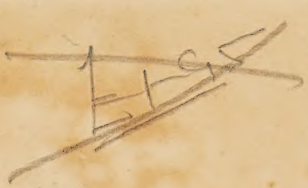

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THE EPISTLE TO

THE HEBREWS

(CHAPTERS VII. TO XIII.)

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF

JAMES

BY

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RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, PEACE SECOND

'First being, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.'—HEB. vii. 2.

THAT mysterious, shadowy figure of the priest-king Melchizedec has been singularly illuminated and solidified by recent discovery. You can see now in Berlin and London, letters written fourteen centuries before Christ, by a king of Jerusalem who describes himself almost in the very words which the Old and the New Testaments apply to Melchizedec. He says that he is a royal priest or a priestly king. He says that he derived his royalty neither from father nor mother, nor by genealogical descent; and he says that he owes it to 'the great King'—possibly an equivalent to the 'Most High God'; of whom Melchizedec is in Scripture said to have been a worshipper. The name of the letter-writer is not Melchizedec, but the fact that his royalty was not hereditary, like a Pharaoh's, may explain how each monarch bore his own personal appellation, and not one common to successive members of a dynasty.

And are not the names of King and city significant —'King of righteousness . . . King of peace'? It sounds like a yearning, springing up untimely in those dim ages of oppression and strife, for a royalty founded on something better than the sword, and wielded for something higher than personal ambition. Such an ideal at such a date is like a summer day that has wandered into a cold March.

But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews imposes a meaning not only on the titles, but on their sequence.

Of course therein he is letting a sanctified imagination play round a fact, and giving to it a meaning which is not in it. None the less in that emphatic expression '*first* King of righteousness, and *after that* also King of peace,' he penetrated very deeply into the heart of Christ's reign and work, and echoed a sentiment that runs all through Scripture. Hearken to one psalmist: 'The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.' Hearken to another: 'Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.' Hearken to a prophet: 'The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.' Hearken to the most Hebraistic of New Testament writers: 'The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.' Hearken to the central teaching of the most Evangelical, if I may so say, of New Testament writers: 'Being justified'—made righteous—'by faith, we have peace with God.' So the 'first' and the 'after that' reveal to us the very depth of Christ's work, and carry in them not only important teaching as to that, but equally important directions and guides for Christian conduct; and it is to this aspect of my text, and this only, that I ask your attention now.

The order which we have here, 'first of all King of righteousness, and after that King of peace,' is the order which I shall try to illustrate in two ways. First, in reference to Christ's work on the individual soul; second, in reference to Christ's work on society and communities.

First, then, here we have laid down the sequence in which

I. Christ comes with His operations and His gifts to the soul that clings to Him.

First 'righteousness . . . after . . . peace.' Now I need not do more than in a sentence remind you of the basis upon which the thoughts in the text, and all right understanding of Christ's work on an individual, repose, and that is that without righteousness no man can either be at peace with God or with himself. Not with God—for however shallow experience may talk effusively and gushingly about a God who is all mercy, and who loves and takes to His heart the sinner and the saint alike; such a God drapes the universe in darkness, and if there are no moral distinctions which determine whether a man is in amity or hostility with God, then 'the pillared firmament itself is rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble.' No, no, brethren; it sounds very tender and kindly; at bottom it is the cruellest thing that you can say, to say that without righteousness a man can please God. The sun is in the heavens, and whether there be mist and fog down here, or the bluest of summer skies, the sun *is* above. But its rays coming through the ethereal blue are warmth and blessedness, and its rays cut off by mists are dim, and itself turned into a lurid ball of fire. It cannot be—and thank God that it cannot—that it is all the same to Him whether a man is saint or sinner.

I do not need to remind you that in like manner righteousness must underlie peace with oneself. For it is true to-day, as it was long generations ago, according to the prophet, that 'the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters throw up mire and dirt,' and, on the other hand, the promise is true still and for ever; 'O that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been like a river,' because 'thy righteousness' will be 'like the waves of the sea.' For ever and ever it stands true that for peace with God,

and for a quiet heart, and a nature at harmony with itself, there must be righteousness.

Well, then, Jesus Christ comes to bring to a man the righteousness without which there can be no peace in his life. And that is the meaning of the great word which, having been taken for a shibboleth and 'test of a falling or a standing Church,' has been far too much ossified into a mere theological dogma, and has been weakened and misunderstood in the process. Justification by faith; that is the battle-cry of Protestant communities. And what does it mean? That I shall be treated as righteous, not being so? That I shall be forgiven and acquitted? Yes, thank God! But is that all that it means, or is that the main thing that it means? No, thank God! for the very heart of the Christian doctrine of righteousness is this, that if, and as soon as, a man puts his trembling trust in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, then he receives not merely pardon, which is the uninterrupted flow of the divine love in spite of his sin, nor an accrediting him with a righteousness which does not belong to him, but an imparting to him of that new life, a spark from the central fire of Christ's life, 'the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Do not suppose that the great message of the gospel is merely forgiveness. Do not suppose that its blessed gift is only that a man is acquitted because Christ has died. All that is true. But there is something more than that which is the basis of that other, and that is that by faith in Jesus Christ, I am so knit to Him—'He that is joined to the Lord' being 'one spirit'—as that there passes into me, by His gift, a life which is created after His life, and is in fact cognate and kindred with it.

No doubt it is a mere germ, no doubt it needs cultivat-

ing, development, carefully guarding against gnawing insects and blighting frosts. But the seed which is implanted, though it be less than the least of all seeds, has in itself the promise and the potency of triumphant growth, when it will tower above all the poisonous shrubs and undergrowth of the forest, and have the light of heaven resting on its aspiring top. Here is the great blessing and distinctive characteristic of Christian morality, that it does not say to a man: 'First aim after good deeds and so grow up into goodness,' but it starts with a gift, and says, 'Work from that, and by the power of that. "I make the tree good,"' says Jesus to us, 'do you see to it that the fruit is good.' No doubt the vegetable metaphor is inadequate, because the leaf is wooed from out the bud, and 'grows green and broad, and takes no care,' but that effortless growth is not how righteousness increases in men. The germ is given them, and they have to cultivate it. First, there must be the impartation of righteousness, and then there comes to the man's heart the sweet assurance of peace with God, and he has within him 'a conscience like a sea at rest, imaginations calm and fair.' 'First, King of righteousness; after that, King of peace.'

Now if we keep firm hold of this sequence, a great many of the popular objections to the gospel, as if it were merely a means of forgiveness and escape, and a system of reconciliation by some kind of forensic expedient, fall away of themselves, and a great many of the popular blunders that Christian people make fall away too. For there are good folks to whom the great truth that 'God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their trespasses,' and welcoming them to all the fulness of an overflowing

love, has obscured the other truth that there is no peace for a Christian man continuous through his life, unless equally continuous through his life are his efforts to work out in acts the new nature which he has received.

Thus my text, by the order in which it places righteousness and peace, not only illuminates the work of Christ upon each individual soul, but comes with a very weighty and clear direction to Christian people as to their course of conduct. Are you looking for comfort? Is what you want to get out of your religion mainly the assurance that you will not go to hell? Is the great blessing that Christ brings to you only the blessing of pardon, which you degrade to mean immunity from punishment? You are wrong. 'First of all, King of righteousness'—let that which is first of all in His gifts be first of all in your efforts too; and do not seek so much for comfort as for grace to know and to do your duty, and strength to 'cast off the unfruitful works of darkness,' and to 'put on the armour of light.' The order which is laid down in my text was laid down with a different application, by our Lord Himself, and ought to be in both forms the motto for all Christian people. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things'—comfort, sense of reconciliation, assurance of forgiveness, joyful hope, and the like, as well as needful material good—'shall be added unto you.'

And now, secondly, my text gives the order of

II. Christ's work in the world, and of His servant's work after Him.

Of course, our Lord's work in the world is simply the aggregate of His work on individual souls. But

for the sake of clearness we may consider these two aspects of it somewhat apart. In regard to this second part of my subject, I would begin, as I began in the former section, by reminding you that the only basis on which harmonious relations between men in communities, great or small, can be built, is righteousness, in the narrowest sense of the word, meaning thereby justice, equal dealing as between man and man, without partiality or class favouritism. Wherever you get an unjustly treated section or order of men, there you get the beginnings of war and strife. A social order built upon injustice, just in the measure in which it is so built, is based upon a quicksand which will suck it down, or on a volcano which will blow it to pieces. Injustice is the grit in the machine; you may oil it as much as you like with philanthropy and benevolence, but until you get the grit out, it will not work smoothly. There is no harmony amongst men unless their association is based and bottomed upon righteousness.

Jesus Christ comes into the world to bring peace at the far end, but righteousness at the near end, and therefore strife. The herald angels sang peace upon earth. They were looking to the deepest and ultimate issues of His mission, but when He contemplated its immediate results He had to say, 'Suppose ye that I bring peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division.' He rode into Jerusalem 'the King, meek, and having salvation,' throned upon the beast of burden which symbolised peace. But He will come forth in the last fight, as He has been coming forth through all the ages, mounted on the white horse, with the sword girt upon His thigh in behalf of meekness and righteousness and truth. Christ, and Christianity

when it keeps close to Christ, is a ferment, not an emollient. The full and honest application of Christ's teaching and principles to any society on the face of the earth at this day is bound to result in agitation and strife. There is no help for it. When a pure jet of water is discharged into a foul ditch, there will be much uprising of mud. Effervescence will always follow when Christ's principles are applied to existing institutions. And so it comes to pass that Christian men, in the measure in which they are true to their Master, turn the world upside down. There will follow, of course, the tranquillity that does follow on righteousness; but that is far ahead, and there is many a weary mile to be trod, and many a sore struggle to be undertaken, before the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and strife ends for ever.

Now, if this be so, then in this necessary characteristic of Christ's operation on the world, viz., disturbance arising from the endeavour to enthrone righteousness where its opposite has ruled — there results very plainly important teaching as to the duties of Christ's servants to take their full share in the fight, to be the knights of the Holy Ghost, the champions of righteousness. The Church ought to lead in the van of all assaults on hoary wrongs or modern forms of unrighteousness in municipal, political, national life. And it is the disgrace of the Church that so largely it leaves that contest to be waged by men who make no pretence to be Christians.

There is, unfortunately, a type of Christian thinking and life, of which in many respects one would speak with all sympathy and admiration, which warns the Christian Church against casting itself into this

contest, in the alleged interest of a superior spirituality and a loftier conception of Evangelical truth. I believe, as heartily as any man can—and I venture to appeal to those who hear me Sunday by Sunday, and from year to year, whether it is not so—that the preaching of Jesus Christ is the cure for all the world's miseries, and the banishment of all the world's unrighteousness; but am I to be told that the endeavour to apply the person and the principles of Jesus Christ, in His life and death, to existing institutions and evils, is *not* preaching Christ? I believe that it is, and that the one thing that the Church wants to-day is not less of holding up the Cross and the Sacrifice, but more of pointing to the Cross and the Sacrifice as the cure of all the world's evils, and the pattern for all righteousness.

It is difficult to do, it is made difficult by our own desire to be what the prophet did not think a very reputable position, 'at ease in Zion.' It is also made difficult by the way in which, as is most natural, the world, meaning thereby godless, organised society, regards an active Church that desires to bring *its* practices to the test of Christ's word. Muzzled watch-dogs that can neither bark nor bite are much admired by burglars. And a Church that confines itself to theory, to what it calls religion, and leaves the world to go to the devil as it likes, suits both the world and the devil. There was once a Prime Minister of England who came out of church one Sunday morning in a state of towering indignation because the clergyman had spoken about conduct. And that is exactly how the world feels about an intrusive Church that *will* push its finger into all social arrangements, and say about each of them, 'This must be *as* Christ commanded.'

Brethren! would God that all Christian men deserved the name of 'troublers of Israel.' There was once a prophet to whom the men of his day indignantly said, 'O sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself in thy scabbard, rest and be still.' And the answer was the only possible one, 'How can it be quiet, seeing that the Lord hath appointed it?' If you and I are Christ's servants, we shall follow the sequence of His operations, and seek to establish righteousness first and then peace.

The true Salem is above.

> 'My soul, there is a country
> Afar beyond the stars.'

There 'sweet peace sits crowned with smiles.' The swords will then be wreathed with laurel and men 'shall learn war no more,' for the King has fought the great fight, 'and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end . . . in righteousness and justice, from henceforth even for ever.' Let us take Him for 'the Lord our righteousness,' and we shall blessedly find that 'this Man is our peace.' Let us take arms in the Holy War which He wages, and we shall have peace in our hearts whilst the fight is sorest. Let us labour to 'be found in Him . . . having the righteousness which is of God by faith,' and then we shall 'be found in Him in peace, without spot, blameless.'

THE PRIEST WHOM WE NEED

'Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.'—HEB. vii. 26.

'IT *became* Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.' 'In all things it *behoved*

Him to be made like unto His brethren.' 'Such an High Priest *became* us.' In these three sayings of this Epistle the historical facts of the gospel are considered as corresponding to or in accordance and congruity with, respectively, the divine nature; Christ's character and purpose; and man's need. I have considered the two former texts in previous sermons, and now I desire to deal with this latter. It asserts that Jesus Christ, regarded as the High Priest, meets the deepest wants of every heart, and fits human necessity as the glove does the hand. He is the answer to all our questions, the satisfaction of all our wants, the bread for our hunger, the light for our darkness, the strength for our weakness, the medicine for our sickness, the life for our death. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

But the other side is quite as true. Christianity is in full accordance with men's wants, Christianity is in sharp antagonism with a great deal which men suppose to be their wants. Men's wishes, desires, readings of their necessities and conceptions of what is in accordance with the divine nature, are not to be taken without more ado as being the guides of what a revelation from God ought to be. The two characteristics of correspondence and opposition must both unite, in all that comes to us certified as being from God. There *is* an 'offence of the Cross'; and Christ, for all His correspondence with the deepest necessities of human nature, and I might even say just by reason of that correspondence, will be 'to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness.' If a message professing to be from God had not the discord between man's expectations and its facts, a message so like a man's would bear upon its front the evidence that it

was of man. If a message professing to be from God had not the correspondence with man's deepest wants, a message so unlike men would bear upon its front the evidence that it was not of God.

So then, remembering the necessary complementary thought to this of my text that 'such a high priest became us,' there are two or three considerations springing from the words that I desire to suggest.

I. The first of them is this—we all need a priest, and we have the priest we need in Jesus Christ.

The outstanding fact in reference to human nature in this connection is that it is a sinful nature. We have all departed from the path of rectitude and have nourished desires and tastes and purposes which do not rend us apart from God, and between us and Him do interpose a great barrier. Our consciences need a priest, or rather they say 'Amen' to the necessity born of our sins, that there shall stand between us and God 'a great High Priest.' I need not elaborate or enlarge upon this matter. The necessity of Christ's sacerdotal character, and the adaptation of that character to men's deepest wants, are not only to be argued about, but we have to appeal to men's consciences, and try to waken them to an adequate and profound sense of the reality and significance of the fact of transgression. If once a man comes to feel, what is true about him, that he is in God's sight a sinful man; to regard that fact in all its breadth, in all its consequences, in all its depth, there will not want any more arguing to make him see that a gospel which deals primarily with the fact of sin, and proclaims a priest whose great work is to offer a sacrifice, is the gospel that he needs.

In fair weather, when the summer seas are sunny and smooth, and all the winds are sleeping in their caves,

the life-belts on the deck of a steamer may be thought to be unnecessary, but when she strikes on the black-toothed rocks, and all about is a hell of noise and despair, then the meaning of them is understood. When you are amongst the breakers you will need a life-buoy. When the flames are flickering round you, you will understand the use and worth of a fire-escape, and when you have learned what sort of a man you are, and what that involves in regard of your relations to God, then the mysteries which surround the thought of the high priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be accepted as mysteries, and left where they are, and the fact will be grasped with all the tendrils of your soul as the one hope for you in life and in death.

I do not care to argue a man out of his imperfect apprehensions, if he have them, of the mission and work of Jesus Christ. But oh, dear friends! you for whose blood I am in some sense responsible, let me plead with you this one thought—you have not taken the point of view from which to judge of the gospel until you have stood in the perfect rectitude of heaven and contrasted your blackness with its stainless purity, and its solemn requirements; and have looked all round the horizon to see if anywhere there is a means by which a sinful soul can be liberated from the dragon's sting of conscience, and from the crushing burden of guilt, and set upon a rock, emancipated and cleansed. We need a priest because we are sinful men, and sin means separation in fact and alienation in spirit, and the entail of dreadful consequences, which, as far as Nature is concerned, cannot be prevented from coming. And so sin means that if men are to be brought again into the fellowship and the family of God, it must be

through One who, being a true priest, offers a real sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The new science of comparative religion has been made by some of its adepts to bear witness unfavourably to the claims of Christianity. A far truer use of it would be this—Wherever men have worshipped, they have worshipped at an altar, there has been on it a sacrifice offered by a purged hand that symbolised moral purity. And all these are witnesses that humanity recognises the necessity which my text affirms has been met in Christ. Some people would say 'Yes! and your doctrine of a Christ who is sacrifice and priest, has precisely the same origin as those altars, many smoking with sacrifices to tyrannical gods.' But to me the relation between the faiths of the world and the gospel of Christ, in reference to this matter, is much rather this, that they proclaim a want, and that Christ brings the satisfaction of it; that they with one voice cry, 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! How shall a man be just with God?' and that the Cross of Christ answers their longings, and offers the means by which we may draw nigh to God. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

II. We may take another consideration from these words, viz.—We need for a priest a perfect man, and we have the perfect priest whom we need, in Jesus Christ.

The writer goes on to enumerate a series of qualities by which our Lord is constituted the priest we need. Of these five qualities which follow in my text, the three former are those to which I now refer. 'He is holy, harmless, undefiled.'

Now I do not need to spend time in discussing the precise meaning of these words, but a remark or two

about each of them may perhaps be admissible. Taken generally, these three characteristics refer to the priest's relation to God, to other men, and to the law of purity. 'He is holy'; that is to say, not so much morally free from guilt as standing in a certain relation to God. The word here used for 'holy' has a special meaning. It is the representative of an old Testament word, which seems to mean 'Devoted to God in love.' And it expresses not merely the fact of consecration, but the motive and the means of that consecration, as being the result of God's love or mercy which kindles self-surrendering love in the recipient. Such is the first qualification for a priest, that he shall be knit to God by loving devotion, and have a heart throbbing in unison with the divine heart in all its tenderness of pity and in all its nobleness and loftiness of purity.

And, besides being thus the earthly echo and representative of the whole sweetness of the divine nature, so, in the next place, the priest we need must, in relation to men, be harmless—without malice, guile, unkindness; a Lamb of God, with neither horns to butt, nor teeth to tear, nor claws to wound, but gentle and gracious, sweet and compassionate; or, as we read in another place in this same letter, 'a merciful High Priest in things pertaining to God.' And the priest that we need to bridge over the gulf between us sinful and alienated men and God, must not only be one knit to God in all sympathy, and representing His purity and tenderness amongst us; nor must the priest that we need by reason of our miseries, our sorrows, our weaknesses, our bleeding wounds, our broken hearts, be only a priest filled with compassion and merciful, who can lay a gentle hand upon our sore and sensitive spirits, but the priest that we men, spattered and

befouled with the mire and filth of sin, which has left deep stains upon our whole nature, need, must be one 'undefiled,' on whose white garments there shall be no speck; on the virgin purity of whose nature there shall be no stain; who shall stand above us, though He be one of us, and whilst 'it behoves Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren,' shall yet be 'without blemish and without spot.'

'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.' The priest of the world must be like the world. My text says, 'Yes! and He must be absolutely unlike the world.' Now, is this not a strange thing—this is a disgression, but it may be allowed for one moment—is it not a strange thing that in these four little tracts which we call gospels, that might all be printed upon two sides of a penny newspaper, you get drawn, with such few strokes, a picture which harmonises, in a possible person, these two opposite requirements, the absolute unlikeness and the perfect likeness? Think of how difficult it would be if it was not a copy from life, to draw a figure with these two characteristics harmonised. What geniuses the men must have been that wrote the gospels, if they were not something much simpler than that, honest witnesses who told exactly what they saw! The fact that the life and death of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Scripture, present this strange combination of two opposite requirements in the most perfect harmony and beauty, is in my eyes no contemptible proof of the historical veracity of the picture which is presented to us. If the life was not lived I, for one, do not believe that it ever could have been invented.

But that, as I said, has nothing to do with my present subject. And so I pass on just to notice, in a word,

how this assemblage of qualifications which, taken together, make up the idea of a perfect man, is found in Jesus Christ for a certain purpose, and a purpose beyond that which some of you, I am afraid, are accustomed to regard. *Why* this innocence; this God-devotedness; this blamelessness; this absence of all selfish antagonism? Why this life, so sweet, so pure, so gentle, so running over with untainted and ungrudging compassion, so conscious of unbroken and perfect communion and sympathy with God? Why? That He might, 'through the Eternal Spirit, offer Himself without spot unto God'; and that by His one offering He might perfect for ever all them that put their trust in Him.

Oh, brother! you do not understand the meaning of Christ's innocence unless you see in it the condition of efficiency of His sacrifice. It is that He might be the priest of the world that He wears this fine linen clean and white, the righteousness of a pure and perfect soul.

I beseech you, then, ponder for yourselves the meaning of this admitted fact. We all acknowledge His purity. We all adore, in some sense of the word, His perfect manhood. If the one stainless and sinless man that the world has ever seen had such a life and such a death as is told in these gospels, they are no gospels, except on one supposition. But for it they are the most despairing proclamation of the old miserable fact that righteousness suffers in the world. The life of Christ, if He be the pure and perfect man that we believe Him to be, and not the perfect priest offering up a pure sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is the most damning indictment that was ever drawn up against the blunders of a Providence that so misgoverns the world.

'He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.' And, therefore, when we look upon His sufferings, in life and in death, we can only understand them and the relation of His innocence to the divine heart when we say: 'Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief,' 'by His stripes we are healed. Such a priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled'; the sacrificial Lamb, without blemish and without spot.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that we need a priest in the heavens, and we have in Christ the heavenly priest whom we need.

The two last qualifications for the priestly office included in my text are, 'separate from sinners; made higher than the heavens.' Now, the 'separation' intended, is not, as I suppose, Christ's moral distance from evil-doers, but has what I may call a kind of half-local signification, and is explained by the next clause. He is 'separate from sinners' not because He is pure and they foul, but because having offered His sacrifice He has ascended up on high.

He is 'made higher than the heavens.' Scripture sometimes speaks of the living Christ as at present in the heavens, and at others as having 'passed through' and being 'high above all heavens'; in the former case simply giving the more general idea of exaltation, in the latter the thought that He is lifted, in His manhood and as our priest, above the bounds of the material and visible creation, and 'set at the right hand of the Majesty on high.'

Such a priest we need. His elevation and separation from us upon earth is essential to that great and continual work of His which we call, for want of any more definite name, His intercession. The High Priest

in the heavens presents His sacrifice there for ever. The past fact of His death on the Cross for the sins of the whole world is ever present as an element determining the direction of the divine dealings with all them that put their trust in Him. That sacrifice was not once only offered upon the Cross, but is ever, in the symbolical language of Scripture, presented anew in the heavens by Him. No time avails to corrupt or weaken the efficacy of that blood; and He has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever. Such a priest we need, to-day, presenting the sacrifice which, to-day, in our weakness and sinfulness, we require.

We need a priest who in the heavens bears us in His heart. As His type in the Old Testament economy entered within the veil with the blood; and when he passed within the curtain and stood before the Light of the Shekinah, had on his breast and on his shoulders, —the home of love, the seat of strength—the names of the tribes, graven on flashing stones, so our priest within the veil has your name and mine, if we love Him, close by His heart, governing the flow of His love, and written on His shoulders, and on the palms of His pierced hands, that all His strength may be granted to us. '*Such* a priest became us.'

And we need a priest separated from the world, lifted above the limitations of earth and time, wielding the powers of divinity in the hands that once were laid in blessing on the little children's heads. And *such* a priest we have. We need a priest in the heavens, whose presence there makes that strange country our home; and by whose footstep, passing through the gates and on to the golden pavements, the gate is open for us, and our faltering poor feet can tread there. And such a priest we have, passed within the veil, that

to-day, in aspiration and prayer; and to-morrow in reality and person, where He is, there we may be also. '*Such* a priest became us.'

We need no other; we do need Him. Oh, friend! are you resting on that sacrifice? Have you given your cause into His hands to plead? Then the great High Priest will make you too His priest to offer a thank-offering, and Himself will present for ever the sacrifice that takes away your sin and brings you near to God. 'It is Christ that died, yea! rather, that is risen again'; and whose death and resurrection alike led on to His ascension to the right hand of God, where for ever 'He maketh intercession for us.'

THE ENTHRONED SERVANT CHRIST

'We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2. A minister of the sanctuary.'—HEB. viii. 1, 2.

A LITTLE consideration will show that we have in these words two strikingly different representations of our Lord's heavenly state. In the one He is regarded as seated 'on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty.' In the other He is regarded as being, notwithstanding that session, a 'minister of the sanctuary'; performing priestly functions there. This combination of two such opposite ideas is the very emphasis and force of the passage. The writer would have us think of the royal repose of Jesus as full of activity for us; and of His heavenly activity as consistent with deepest repose. Resting He works; working He rests. Reigning He serves; serving He reigns. So my purpose is simply to deal with these

two representations, and to seek to draw from them and from their union the lessons that they teach.

I. Note, then, first, the seated Christ.

'We have a high priest who'—to translate a little more closely—'has *taken His seat* on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' 'Majesty' is a singular expression or periphrasis for God. It is used once again in this letter, and seems probably to have been derived by the writer from the Rabbinical usage of his times, when, as we know, a certain misplaced, and yet most natural, reverential or perhaps superstitious awe, made men unwilling to name the mighty name, and inclined rather to fall back upon other forms of speech to express it.

So the writer here, addressing Hebrews, steeped in Rabbinical thought, takes one of their own words and speaks of God as the 'Majesty in the heavens'; emphasising the idea of sovereignty, power, illimitable magnificence. 'At the right hand' of this throned personal abstraction, 'the Majesty,' sits the Man Christ Jesus.

Now the teaching, both of this Epistle to the Hebrews and of the whole New Testament, in reference to the state of our exalted Lord, is that His manhood is elevated to this supreme dignity. The Eternal Word who was with the Father in the beginning, before all the worlds, went back to 'the glory which He had with the Father.' But the new thing was that there went, too, that human nature which Jesus Christ indissolubly united with divinity in the mystery of the lowliness of His earthly life. An ancient prophet foretold that in the Messianic times there should spring from the cut-down stump of the royal house of Israel a sucker which, feeble at first, and in strange contrast with the

venerable ruin from which it arose, should grow so swiftly, so tall and strong, that it should become an ensign for the nations of the world; and then, he adds, 'and His resting-place shall be glory.' There was a deeper meaning in the words, I suppose, than the prophet knew, and we shall not be chargeable with forcing New Testament ideas upon Old Testament words which are a world too narrow for them, if we say that there is at least shadowed the great thought that the lowly manhood, sprung from the humbled royal stock, shall grow up as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and be lifted to find its rest and dwelling-place in the very central blaze of the divine glory. We have a High Priest who, in His manhood, in which He is knit to us, hath taken His seat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Then, again, remember that whilst in such representations as this we have to do with realities set forth under the symbols of time and place, there is yet a profound sense in which that session of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God proclaims both the localisation of His present corporeal humanity and the ubiquity of His presence. For what *is* 'the right hand of God'? What is it but the manifestation of His energies, the forthputting of His power? And where is that but everywhere, where He makes Himself known? Wheresoever divine activity is manifested, there is Jesus Christ. But yet, though this be true, and though it may be difficult for us to hold the balance and mark the dividing line between symbol and reality, we are not to forget that the facts of Christ's wearing now a real though glorified body, and of His visible corporeal ascension, and the promise of a similar visible

corporeal return to earth at the end of the days seem to require the belief that, above all the heavens, and filling all things, as that exalted manhood is, there is yet what we must call a place, wherein that glorified body now abides. And thus both the awful majestic idea of omnipresence, and the no less majestic idea of the present localisation in place of the glorified Christ, are taught us in the text.

And what is the deepest meaning of it all? What means that majestic session at 'the right hand of the throne'? Before that throne 'angels veil their faces.' If in action, they stand; if in adoration, they fall before Him. Creatures bow prostrate. Who is He that, claiming and exercising a power which in a creature is blasphemy and madness, *takes His seat* in that awful presence? Other words of Scripture represent the same idea in a still more wonderful form when they speak of 'the throne of God and of the Lamb,' and when He Himself speaks from heaven of Himself as 'set down with My Father on His throne.'

If we translate the symbol into colder words, it means that deep repose, which, like the divine rest after creation, is not for recuperation of exhausted powers, but is the sign of an accomplished purpose and achieved task, a share in the sovereignty of heaven, and the wielding of the energies of deity—rest, royalty, and power belong now to the Man sitting at the right hand of the throne of God.

II. Note, secondly, the servant Christ.

'A minister of the sanctuary,' says my text. Now the word employed here for 'minister,' and which I have ventured variously to translate servant, means one who discharges some public official act of service either to God or man, and it is especially, though by no

means exclusively, employed in reference to the service of a ministering priest.

The allusion in the second portion of my text is plainly enough to the ritual of the great day of atonement, on which the high priest once a year went into the holy place; and there, in the presence of God throned between the cherubim, made atonement for the sins of the people, by the offering of the blood of the sacrifice. Thus, says our writer, that throned and sovereign Man who, in token of His accomplished work, and in the participation of deity, sits hard by the throne of God, is yet ministering at one and the same time within the veil, and presenting the might of His own sacrifice.

Put away the metaphor and we just come to this, a truth which is far too little dwelt upon in this generation, that the work which Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross, all sufficient and eternal as it was in the range and duration of its efficacy, is not all His work. The past, glorious as it is, needs to be supplemented by the present, no less wonderful and glorious, in which Jesus Christ within the veil, in manners all unknown to us, by His presence there in the power of the sacrifice that He has made, brings down upon men the blessings that flow from that sacrifice. It is not enough that the offering should be made. The deep teaching, the whole reasonableness of which it does not belong to us here and now to apprehend, but which faith will gladly grasp as a fact, though reason may not be able to answer the question of the why or how, tells us that the interceding Christ must necessarily take up the work of the suffering Christ. Dear brethren, our salvation is not so secured by the death upon the Cross as to make needless the life beside the throne. Jesus that

died is the Christ 'that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

But, beyond that, may I remind you that my text, though not in its direct bearing, yet in its implication, suggests to us other ways in which the rest of Christ is full of activity. 'I am among you as He that serveth' is true for the heavenly glory of the exalted Lord quite as much as for the lowly humiliation of His life upon earth. And no more really did He stoop to serve when, laying aside His garments, He girded Himself with the towel, and wiped the disciples' feet, than He does to-day when, having resumed the garments of His glorious divinity, and having seated Himself in His place of authority above us, He comes forth, according to the wonderful condescension of His own parable, to serve His servants who have entered into rest, and those also who still toil. The glorified Christ is a ministering Christ. In us, on us, for us He works, in all the activities of His exalted repose, as truly and more mightily than He did when here He helped the weaknesses and healed the sicknesses, and soothed the sorrows and supplied the wants, and washed the feet, of a handful of poor men.

He has gone up on high, but in His rest He works. He is on the throne, but in His royalty He serves. He is absent from us, but His power is with us. The world's salvation was accomplished when He cried, 'It is finished'! But 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' and they who saw Him ascend into the heavens, and longingly followed the diminishing form as it moved slowly upward, with hands extended in benediction, as they turned away, when there was nothing more to be seen but the cloud, 'went every-

where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

So then, let us ever hold fast, inextricably braided together, the rest and the activity, the royalty and the service, of the glorified Son of Man.

III. And now, in the last place, let me point to one or two of the practical lessons of such thoughts as these.

They have a bearing on the three categories of past, present, future. For the past a seal, for the present a strength, for the future a prophecy.

For the past a seal. If it be true—and there are few historical facts the evidence for which is more solid or valid—that Jesus Christ really went up into the heavens, and abode there, then that is God's last and most emphatic declaration, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' The trail of light that He leaves behind Him, as He is borne onwards, falls on the Cross, and tells us that it is the centre of the world's history. For what can be greater, what can afford a firmer foundation for us sinful men to rest our confidence upon, than the death of which the recompense was that the Man who died sits on the throne of the universe?

Brethren! an ascended Christ forces us to believe in an atoning Christ. No words can exaggerate, nor can any faith exalt too highly, or trust too completely, the sacrifice which led straight to that exaltation. Read the Cross by the light of the throne. Let Olivet interpret Calvary, and we shall understand what Calvary means.

Again, this double representation of my text is a strength for the present. I know of nothing that is mighty enough to draw men's desires and fix solid reasonable thought and love upon that awful future,

except the belief that Christ is there. I think that the men who have most deeply realised what a solemn, and yet what a vague and impalpable thing the conception of immortal life beyond the grave is, will be most ready to admit that the thought is cold, cheerless, full of blank misgivings and of waste places, in which the speculative spirit feels itself very much a foreigner. There is but one thought that flashes warmth into the coldness, and turns the awfulness and the terror of the chilling magnificence into attractiveness and homelikeness and sweetness, and that is that Christ is there sitting at the right hand of God. Foreign lands are changed in their aspect to us when we have brothers and sisters there; and our Brother has gone whither we too, when we send our thoughts after Him, can feel that our home is, because there He is. The weariness of existence here is only perpetuated and intensified when we think of it as prolonged for ever. But with Christ in the heavens, the heavens become the home of our hearts.

In like manner, if we only lay upon our spirits as a solid reality, and keep ever clear before us, as a plain fact, the present glory of Jesus Christ and His activity for us, oh! then life becomes a different thing, sorrows lose their poison and their barb, cares become trivial, anxieties less gnawing, the weights of duty or of suffering less burdensome; and all things have a new aspect and a new aim. If you and I, dear friends, can see the heavens opened, and Jesus on the throne, how petty, how unworthy to fix our desires, or to compel our griefs, will all the things here below seem. We then have the true standard, and the littlenesses that swell themselves into magnitude when there is nothing to compare them with will shrink into their insignifi-

cance. Lift the mists and let the Himalayas shine out; and what then about the little molehills in the foreground, that looked so big whilst the great white mass was invisible? See Christ, and He interprets, dwindles, and yet ennobles the world and life.

Lastly, such a vision gives us a prophecy for the future. *There* is the measure of the possibilities of human nature. A somewhat arrogant saying affirms, 'Whatever a man has done, a man can do.' Whatever *that* Man is, I may be. It is possible that humanity may be received into the closest union with divinity, and it is certain that if we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ by simple faith and lowly, obedient love, whatever He is He will give to us to share. 'Even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne,' is His own measure of what He will do for the men who are faithful and obedient to Him.

I do not say that there is no other adequate proof of immortality than the facts of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. I do not know that I should be far wrong if I ventured even on that assertion. But I do say that there is no means by which a poor sinful soul will reach the realisation of the possibilities that open to it, except faith in Jesus Christ. If we love Him, anything unreasonable and impossible is more reasonable and possible than that the Head shall be glorified and the members left to see corruption. If I am wedded to Jesus Christ, as you all may be if you will trust your souls to Him and love Him, then God will take us and Him as one into the glory of His presence, where we may dwell with and in Christ, in indissoluble union through the ages of eternity.

My text is the answer to all doubts and fears for ourselves. It shows us what the true conception of a

perfect heaven is, the perfection of rest and the perfection of service. As Christ's heaven is the fulness of repose and of activity, so shall that of His servants be. 'His servants shall serve Him'—there is the activity—'and see His face'—there is the restful contemplation—'and His name shall be in their foreheads'—there is the full participation in His character and glory.

And so, dear brethren, for the world and for ourselves, hope is duty and despair is sin. Here is the answer to the question, Can I ever enter that blessed land? Here is the answer to the question, Is the dream of perfected manhood ever to be more than a dream? 'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus,' and, seeing Him, no hope is absurd, and anything but hope is falling beneath our privileges. Then, dear friends, let us look unto Him who, 'for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Throne of God.'

THE TRUE IDEAL

'See (saith He) that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.'—HEB. viii. 5.

I DO not intend to deal with the original bearing of these words, nor with the use made of them by the writer of Hebrews. Primarily they refer to the directions as to the Tabernacle and its furniture, which are given at such length, and with such minuteness, in Leviticus, and are there said to have been received by Moses on Sinai. The author of this Epistle attaches an even loftier significance to them, as supporting his

contention that the whole ceremonial worship, as well as the Temple and its equipment, was a copy of heavenly realities, the heavenly sanctuary and its altar and priest. I wish to take a much humbler view of the injunction, and to apply it, with permissible violence, as a maxim for conduct and the great rule for the ordering of our lives. 'See that thou,' in thy shop and office, and wherever thou mayst be, 'make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.' A far-reaching, high-soaring commandment, not to be obeyed without much effort, and able to revolutionise the lives of most of us. There are three points in it: the pattern, its universal applicability, and the place where we get to see it.

I. The pattern.—The difference between noble and ignoble lives is very largely that the one has—and seeks, however partially and interruptedly, to follow—an ideal and the other has not. Or, to put it into plainer words, the one man regulates his life according to momentary inclinations and the obvious calls of sense, business and the like, and the other man has, far ahead and high up, a great light burning, to which he is ever striving to attain. The one has an aim to which he can only approximate, and the other largely lives from hand to mouth, as circumstances and sense, and the recurring calls of material necessities, or temptations that are put in his way every day, may dictate. And so, the one turns out a poor creature, and the other—God helping him—may turn out a saint. Which are you? Which we are depends very largely on the clearness with which we keep before us—like some great mountain summit rising above the mists, and stirring the ambition of every climber to reach the peak, where foot has never trod—the ideal, to use

modern language, or to fall back upon the good old-fashioned Bible words, 'the pattern shewed to us.'

You know that in mountain districts the mists are apt to gather their white folds round the summits, and that often for many days the dwellers in the plains have to plod along on their low levels, without a glimpse of the calm peak. And so it is with our highest ideal. Earth-born mists from the undrained swamps in our own hearts hide it too often from our eyes, and even when that is not the case, we are like many a mountaineer, who never lifts an eye to the sacred summit overhead, nor looks higher than his own fields and cattle-sheds. So it needs an effort to keep clear before us the pattern that is high above us, and to make very plain to ourselves, and very substantial in our thoughts, the unattained and untrodden heights. 'Not in vain the distance' should 'beckon.' 'Forward, forward, let us range,' should always be our word. 'See that thou make all things after the pattern,' and do not rule your lives according to whim, or fancy, or inclination, or the temptations of sense and circumstances.

To aim at the unreached is the secret of perpetual youth. No man is old as long as he aspires. It is the secret of perpetual growth. No man stagnates till he has ceased to see, or to believe in great dim possibilities for character, as yet unrealised. It is the secret of perpetual blessedness. No man can be desolate who has for his companion the unreached self that he may become. And so artist, poet, painter, all live nobler lives than they otherwise would, because they live, not so much with the commonplace realities round them, as with noble ideals, be they of melody or of beauty, or of musical words and great thoughts. There should be the same life with, and directed towards, attaining

the unattained in the moralist, and above all in the Christian.

But then, do not let us forget that we are not here in our text, as I am using it in this sermon, relegated to a pattern which takes its origin, after all, in our own thoughts and imaginations. The poet's ideal, the painter's ideal, varies according to his genius. Ours has taken solidity and substance and a human form, and stands before us, and says: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.' 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern,' and be thankful that we are not left to our own thoughts, or to our brethren's teachings, or to abstract ideas of the true and the beautiful and the good for our pattern and mould of life, but that we have the law embodied in a Person, and the ideal made actual, in our Brother and our Saviour. *There* is the joy and the blessedness of the Christian aim after Christian perfection. There is something unsubstantial, misty, shadowy, in an ideal which is embodied nowhere. It is ghost-like, and has little power to move or to attract. But for Christians the pattern is all gathered into the one sweet, heart-compelling form of Jesus, and whatever is remote and sometimes cold in the thought of an unattained aim, changes when we make it our supreme purpose to be like Jesus Christ. Our goal is no cold, solitary mountain top. It is the warm, loving heart, and companionable purity and perfectness of our Brother, and when we can, even in a measure, reach that sweet resting-place, we are wrapped in the soft atmosphere of His love. We shall be like Him when we see Him as He is; we grow like Him here, in the measure in which we do see Him, even darkly. We reach Him most surely by loving Him, and we become like Him most surely by

loving Him, for love breeds likeness, and they who live near the light are drenched with the light, and become lights in their turn.

There is another point here that I would suggest, and that is

II. The universal applicability of the pattern.—'See that thou make *all* things.' Let us go back to Leviticus. There you will find page after page that reads like an architect's specification. The words that I have taken as my text are given in immediate connection with the directions for making the seven-branched candlestick, which are so minute and specific and detailed, that any brass-founder in Europe could make one to-day 'after the pattern.' So many bowls, so many knops, so many branches; such and such a distance between each of them; and all the rest of it—there it is, in most prosaic minuteness. Similarly, we read how many threads and fringes, and how many bells on the high priest's robe. Verse after verse is full of these details; and then, on the back of them all, comes, 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern.' Which things are a parable—and just come to this, that the minutest pieces of daily life, the most commonplace and trivial incidents, may all be moulded after that great example, the life of Jesus Christ.

It is one of the miracles of revelation that it should be so. The life of Jesus Christ, in the fragmentary records of it in these four Gospels, although it only covered a few years, and is very imperfectly recorded, and in outward form was passed under conditions most remote from the strange complex conditions of *our* civilisation, yet fits as closely as a glove does to the hand, to all the necessities of *our* daily lives. Men and women, young men and maidens, old men and children,

professional men and students, women in their houses, men of business, merchants, and they that sail the sea and they that dig in the mine, they may all find directions for everything that they have to do, in that one life.

And here is the centre and secret of it. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.' Therefore that which is the law for Jesus is the law for us, and the next verse goes on; 'he that loveth his life shall lose it,' and the next verse hammers the nail farther in: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.'—Take that injunction and apply it, in all the details of daily life, and you will be on the road to reproduce the pattern.

But remember the 'all things.' It is for us, if we are Christian people, to bring the greatest principles to bear on the smallest duties, 'Small duties?' 'Great' and 'small' are adjectives that ought never to be tacked on to 'duty.' For all duties are of one size, and while we may speak, and often do speak, very mistakenly about things which we vulgarly consider 'great,' or superciliously treat as 'small,' the fact is that no man can tell what is a great thing, and what is a small one. For the most important crises in a man's life have a strange knack of leaping up out of the smallest incidents; just as a whisper may start an avalanche, and so nobody can tell what are the great things and what the small ones. The tiniest pin in a machine drops out, and all the great wheels stop. The small things are the things that for the most part make up life. You can apply Christ's example to the least of them, and there is very small chance of your applying it to the great things if you have not been in the way of applying it to the small ones. For the small things make the habits which the great ones test and require.

So 'thorough' is the word. 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern.'

I remember once going up to the roof of Milan Cathedral, and finding there stowed away behind a buttress—where I suppose one man in fifty years might notice it, a little statuette, as completely chiselled, as perfectly polished, as if it had been of giant size, and set in the façade for all the people in the piazza to see. That is the sort of way in which Christian men should carve out their lives. Finish off the unseen bits perfectly, and then you may be quite sure that the seen bits will take care of themselves. 'See that thou make *all* things'—and begin with the small ones—'according to the pattern.'

Lastly,

III. Where we are to see the pattern.—'Shewed to thee *in the mount*.' Ay, that is where we have to go if we are to see it. The difference between Christian men's convictions of duty depends largely on the difference in the distance that they have climbed up the hill. The higher you go, the better you see the lie of the land. The higher you go, the purer and more wholesome the atmosphere. And many a thing which a Christian man on the low levels thought to be perfectly in accordance with 'the pattern,' when he goes up a little higher, he finds to be hopelessly at variance with it. It is of no use to lay down a multitude of minute, red-tape regulations as to what Christian morality requires from people in given circumstances. Go up the hill, and you will see for yourselves.

Our elevation determines our range of vision. And the nearer, and the closer, and the deeper is our habitual fellowship with God in Christ, the more lofty will be our conceptions of what we ought to be and do. The

reason for inconsistent lives is imperfect communion, and the higher we go on the mountain of vision, the clearer will be our vision. On the other hand, whilst we see 'the pattern' in the mount, we have to come down into the valley to 'make' the 'things.' The clay and the potter's wheels are down in Hinnom, and the mountain top is above. You have to carry your pattern-book down, and set to work with it before you. Therefore, whilst the way to see the pattern is to climb, the way to copy it is to descend. And having faithfully copied what you saw on the Mount of Vision, you will see more the next time you go back; for 'to him that hath shall be given.'

THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT

I. GOD'S WRITING ON THE HEART

. . . 'I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.'—HEB. viii. 10.

WE can scarcely estimate the shock to a primitive Hebrew Christian when he discovered that Judaism was to fade away. Such an earthquake might seem to leave nothing standing. Now, the great object of this Epistle is to insist on that truth, and to calm the early Hebrew Christians under it, by showing them that the disappearance of the older system left them no poorer but infinitely richer, inasmuch as all that was in it was more perfectly in Christ's gospel. The writer has accordingly been giving his strength to showing that, all along the line, Christianity is the perfecting of Judaism, in its Founder, in its priesthood, in its ceremonies, in its Sabbath. Here he touches the great central thought of the covenant between God and man, and he falls back upon the strange words of one

of the old prophets. Jeremiah had declared as emphatically as he, the writer, has been declaring, that the ancient system was to melt away and be absorbed in a new covenant between God and man. Is there any other instance of a religion which, on the one side, proclaims its own eternal duration—'the Word of the Lord endureth for ever'—and on the other side declares that it is to be abrogated, antiquated, and done away? The writer of the Epistle had learned from sacreder lips than Jeremiah's the same lesson, for the Master said at the most solemn hour of His career, 'This is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'

These articles of the New Covenant go very deep into the essence of Christianity, and may well be thoughtfully pondered by us all, if we wish to know what the specific differences between the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ, and all other systems are. The words I have read for my text are the first of these articles.

I. Let us try to ascertain what exactly is the meaning of this great promise.

Now it seems to me that the two clauses which I have read for my text are not precisely parallel, but parallel with a difference. I take it, that 'mind' here means very much what we make it mean in our popular phraseology, a kind of synonym for the understanding, or the intellectual part of a man's nature; and that 'heart,' on the other hand, means something a little wider than it does in our popular phraseology, and indicates not only the affections, but the centre of personality in the human will, as well as the seat of love. So these two clauses will mean, you see, if we carry that distinction with us, two things—the clear perception of the will of God, and the coincidence of

that will with our inclinations and desires. In men's natural consciences, there is the law written on their minds, but alas! we all know that there is an awful chasm between perception and inclination, and that it is one thing to know our duty, and quite another to wish to do it. So the heart of this great promise of my text is that these two things shall coincide in a Christian man, shall cover precisely the same ground; as two of Euclid's triangles having the same angles will, if laid upon each other, coincide line for line and angle for angle. Thus, says this great promise, it is possible—and, if we observe the conditions, it will be actual in us—that knowledge and will shall cover absolutely and exactly the same ground. Inclination will be duty, and duty will be inclination and delight. Nothing short of such a thought lies here.

And how is that wonderful change upon men to be accomplished? '*I* will put, *I* will write.' Only He can do it. We all know, by our own experience, the schism that gapes between the two things. *Every* man in the world knows a vast deal more of duty than *any* man in the world does. The worst of us has a standard that rebukes his evil, and the best of us has a standard that transcends his goodness, and, alas! often transcends his inclination. But the gospel of our Lord and Saviour comes armed with sufficient power to make this miracle an actuality for us all.

For it comes, does it not, to substitute for all other motives to obedience, the one motive of love? They but half understand the gospel who dwell upon its sanctions of reward and punishment, and would seek to frighten men into goodness by brandishing the whip of law before them, and uncovering the lid that shuts in the smoke of a hell. And they misinterpret it

almost as much, if there be any such, who find the chief motive for Christian obedience in the glories of the heavenly state. These are subordinate and legitimate in their secondary place, but the gospel appeals to men, not merely nor chiefly on the ground of self-interest, but it comes to them with the one appeal, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' That is how the law is written on the heart. Wherever there is love, there is a supreme delight in divining and in satisfying the wish and will of the beloved. His lightest word is law to the loving heart; his looks are spells and commandments. And if it is so in regard of our poor, imperfect, human loves, how infinitely more so is it where the heart is touched by true affection for His own infinite love's sake, of that 'Jesus' who is 'most desired!' The secret of Christian morality is that duty is changed into choice, because love is made the motive for obedience.

And, still further, let me remind you how this great promise is fulfilled in the Christian life, because to have Christ shrined in the heart is the heart of Christianity, and Christ Himself is our law. So, in another sense than that which I have been already touching, the law is written on the heart on which, by faith and self-surrender, the name of Christ is written. And when it becomes our whole duty to become like Him, then He being throned in our hearts, our law is within, and Himself to His 'darlings' shall be, as the poet has it about another matter, 'both law and impulse.' Write His name upon your hearts, and your law of life is thereby written there.

And, still further, let me remind you that this great promise is fulfilled, because the very specific gift of Christianity to men is the gift of a new nature which

is 'created in righteousness and holiness that flows from truth.' The communication of a divine life kindred with, and percipient of, and submissive to, the divine will is the gift that Christianity—or, rather, let us put away the abstraction and say that Christ—offers to us all, and gives to every man who will accept it. And thus, and in other ways on which I cannot dwell now, this great article of the New Covenant lies at the very foundation of the Christian life, and gives its peculiar tinge and cast to all Christian morality, commandment, and obligation.

But let me remind you how this great truth has to be held with caution. The evidence of this letter itself shows that, whilst the writer regarded it as a distinctive characteristic of the gospel, that by it men's wills were stamped with a delight in the law of God, and a transcript thereof, he still regarded these wills as unstable, as capable of losing the sharp lettering, of having the writing of God obliterated, and still regarded it as possible that there should be apostasy and departure.

So there is nothing in this promise which suspends the need for effort and for conflict. Still 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit.' Still there are parts of the nature on which that law is not written. It is the final triumph, that the whole man, body, soul, and spirit is, through and through, penetrated with, and joyfully obedient to, the commandments of the Lord. There is need, too, not only for continuous progress, effort, conflict, in order to keep our hearts open for His handwriting, but also for much caution, lest at any time we should mistake our own self-will for the utterance of the divine voice. 'Love, and do what thou wilt,' said a great Christian teacher. It is an unguarded

statement, but profoundly true as in some respects it is, it is only absolutely true if we have made sure that the 'thou' which 'wills' is the heart on which God has written His law.

Only God can do this for us. The Israelites of old were bidden 'these things which I command thee this day shall be on thy heart,' and they were to write them on their hand, and on the frontlet between their eyes, and on their doorposts. The latter commands were obeyed, having been hardened into a form; and phylacteries on the arm, and scrolls on the lintel, were the miserable obedience which was given to them. But the complete writing on the heart was beyond the power of unaided man. A psalmist said, 'I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart.' But a verse or two after, in the same psalm, he wailed, 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head. Therefore my heart faileth me.' One Man has transcribed the divine will on His will, without blurring a letter, or omitting a clause. One Man has been able to say, in the presence of the most fearful temptations, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' One Man has so completely written, perceived, and obeyed the law of His Father, that, looking back on all His life, He was conscious of no defect or divergence, either in motive or in act, and could affirm on the Cross, 'It is finished.' He who thus perfectly kept that divine law will give to us, if we ask Him, His spirit, to write it upon our hearts, and 'the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Now, secondly, note the impassable gulf which this fulfilled promise makes between Christianity and all other systems.

It is a *new* covenant, undoubtedly—an altogether new thing in the world. For whatever other laws have been promulgated among men have had this in common, that they have stood over against the Will with a whip in one hand, and a box of sweets in the other, and have tried to influence desires and inclinations, first by the setting forth of duty, then by threatening, and then by promises to obedience. *There* is the inherent weakness of all which is merely law. You do not make men good by telling them in what goodness consists, nor yet by setting forth the bitter consequences that may result from wrong-doing. All that is surface work. But there is a power which says that it deals with the will as from within, and moves, and moulds, and revolutionises it. 'You cannot make men sober by act of parliament,' people say. Well! I do not believe the conclusion which is generally drawn from that statement, but it is perfectly true in itself. To tell a man what he ought to do is very, very little help towards his doing it. I do not under-estimate the value of a clear perception of duty, but I say that, apart from Christianity, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that clear perception of duty is like a clear opening of a great gulf between a man and safety, which only makes him recoil in despair with the thought, 'how can I ever leap across *that*?' But the peculiarity of the gospel is that it gives both the knowledge of what we ought to be; and with and in the knowledge, the desire, and with and in the knowledge and the desire, the power to be what God would have us to be.

All other systems, whether the laws of a nation, or the principles of a scientific morality, or the solemn voice that speaks in our minds proclaiming some

version of God's law to every man — all these are comparatively impotent. They are like bill-stickers going about a rebellious province posting the king's proclamation. Unless they have soldiers at their back, the proclamation is not worth the paper it is printed upon. But Christianity comes, and gives us that which it requires from us. So, in his epigrammatic way, St. Augustine penetrated to the very heart of this article when he prayed, 'Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.'

III. Note the freedom and blessedness of this fulfilled promise.

Not to do wrong may be the mark of a slave's timid obedience. Not to wish to do wrong is the charter of a son's free and blessed service. There is a higher possibility yet, reserved for heaven—not to be able to do wrong. Freedom does not consist in doing what I like—that turns out, in the long run, to be the most abject slavery, under the severest tyrants. But it consists in liking to do what I ought. When my wishes and God's will are absolutely coincident, then and only then, am I free. That is no prison, out of which we do not wish to go. Not to be confined against our wills, but voluntarily to elect to move only within the sacred, charmed, sweet circle of the discerned will of God, is the service and liberty of the sons of God.

Alas! there are a great many Christians, so-called, who know very little about such blessedness. To many of us religion is a burden. It consists of a number of prohibitions and restrictions and commandments equally unwelcome. 'Do not do this,' and all the while I would like to do it. 'Do that,' and all the while I do not want to do it. 'Pray, because it is your duty; go to chapel, because you think it is God's will; give

money that you would much rather keep in your pockets: abstain from certain things that you hunger for; do other things that you do not at all desire to do, nor find any pleasure in doing.' That is the religion of hosts of people. They have need to ask themselves whether their religion is Christ's religion. Ah! brethren!—'My yoke is easy and My burden light; not because the things that He bids and forbids are less or lighter than those which the world's morality requires of its followers, but because, so to speak, the yoke is padded with the velvet of love, and inclination coincides, in the measure of our true religion, with the discerned will of God.

IV. Lastly, one word about the condition of the fulfilment of this promise to us.

As I have been saying, it is sadly far ahead of the experience of crowds of so-called Christians. There are still great numbers of professing Christians, and I doubt not that I speak to some such, on whose hearts only a very few of the syllables of God's will are written, and these very faintly and blotted. But remember that the fundamental idea of this whole context is that of a covenant, and a covenant implies two parties, and duties and obligations on the part of each. If God is in covenant with you, you are in covenant with God. If He makes a promise, there is something for you to do in order that that promise may be fulfilled to you.

What is there to do? First, and last, and midst, keep close to Jesus Christ. In the measure in which we keep ourselves in continual touch with Him, will His law be written upon our hearts. If we are for ever twitching away the paper; if we are for ever flinging blots and mud upon it, how can we expect the

transcript to be clear and legible? We must keep still that God may write. We must wait habitually in His presence. When the astronomer wishes to get the image of some far-off star, invisible to the eye of sense, he regulates the motion of his sensitive plate, so that for hours it shall continue right beneath the unseen beam. So we have to still our hearts, and keep their plates—the fleshy tables of them—exposed to the heavens. Then the likeness of God will be stamped there.

Be faithful to what is written there, which is the Christian shape of the heathen commandment—'Do the duty that lies nearest thee; so shall the next become plainer.' Be faithful to the line that is 'written,' and there will be more on the tablet to-morrow.

Now this is a promise for us all. However blotted and blurred and defaced by crooked, scrawling letters, like a child's copy-book, with its first pot-hooks and hangers, our hearts may be, there is no need for any of us to say despairingly, as we look on the smeared page, 'What I have written I have written.' He is able to blot it all out, to 'take away the hand-writing'—our own—'that is against us, nailing it to His Cross,' and to give us, in our inmost spirits, a better knowledge of, and a glad obedience to, His discerned and holy will. So that each of us, if we choose, and will observe the conditions, may be able to say with all humility, 'Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of *me*, *I* delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within *my* heart.'

II. THEIR GOD, MY PEOPLE

'I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.'—HEB. viii. 10.

Two mirrors set over against each other reflect one another and themselves in each other, in long perspective. Two hearts that love, with similar reciprocation of influence, mirror back to each other their own affections. 'I am thine; thou art mine,' is the very mother-tongue of love, and the source of blessedness. All loving hearts know that. That mutual surrender, and, in surrender, reciprocal possession, is lifted up here into the highest regions. 'I will be their God, they shall be My people.' That was the fundamental promise of the Mosaic dispensation, laid at Sinai—'Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession.' All through the Old Testament we find it re-echoed; and yet the interpenetration of God and the people was imperfect and external in that ancient covenant.

So the writer here, falling back upon the marvellous prophecy of Jeremiah, regards this as being one of the characteristics of Christianity, that what was shadowed in Israel's possession of God and God's possession of Israel, is, in substance, blessedly and permanently realised in the relations of God to Christian souls, and of Christian souls to God.

Not only is there this mutual possession, as expressed by the two halves of my text, but each half, when cleft and analysed, reveals the necessity for a similar reciprocity. For God's giving of Himself to us is nothing to us without our taking of God for ours; and, in like manner, our giving of ourselves to God, would be all incomplete, unless in His strange love, He stooped

from amidst the praises of Israel to accept the poor gifts that we bring.

So the duality of my text breaks up into a double dualism, and we have God giving Himself to us, and His gift realised in our acceptance of Him for ours; and then we have our giving of ourselves to God, and the gift realised and ratified in His acceptance of us for His. And to these four points, briefly, I wish to turn.

I. 'I will be to them a God.' That is God's gift of Himself to us.

The words go far deeper than the necessary divine relation to all His creatures. He is a God to every star that burns, and to every worm that creeps, and to every gnat that dances for a moment. But there is a closer relation, and more blessed than that. He is a God to every man that lives, lavishing upon him manifestations of His divinity, and sustaining him in life. But besides these great and wondrous universal relations which spring from the very fact of creative power and creatural independence, there is a tenderer, a truer relationship of heart to heart, of spirit to spirit, which is set forth here as the prerogative of the men who trust in Jesus Christ. The special does not contradict or deny the universal, the universal does not exclude the special—'I will be a God to them,' in a deeper, more blessed, soul-satisfying, and vital sense than to others around them.

And what lies in that great promise passes the wit of man and the tongues of angels fully to conceive and tell. All that lies in that majestic monosyllable, which is shorthand for life, and light, and all perfectness, lived in a living person who has a heart, that word *God*—all that is included in that name, God will be to you

and me, if we like to have Him for such. 'I will be a God to them'—then round about them shall be cast the bulwark of the everlasting arm and the everlasting purpose. 'I will be a God to them'—then in all dark places there will be a light, and in all perplexities there will be a path, and in all anxieties there will be quietness, and in all troubles there will be a hidden light of joy, and in every circumstance life will be saturated with an almighty presence, which shall make the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. 'I will be a God to them'—then their desires, their hungerings after blessedness, their seekings after good, need no longer roam open-mouthed and empty, throughout a waste world where there is only scanty fodder enough to keep them from expiring but never food enough to satisfy them; but in Him longings and hopes will all find their appropriate satisfaction. And there will be rest in God, and whatsoever aspirations after loftier goodness may have to be cherished, and whatsoever base hankerings still lingering have to be fought, the strength of a present God will enable us to aspire, and not to be disappointed, and to cast ourselves into the conflict, and be ever victorious. 'I will be to them a God,' is the same as to say that everything which my complex nature can require I shall find in Him.

It says, too, that all that Godhood, in all the incomprehensible sweep of its attributes, is on my side, if I will. They tell us that there are rays in the spectrum which no eye can see, but which yet have mightier chemical and other influences than those that are visible. The spectrum of God is not all visible, but beyond the limits of comprehension there lie dark energies which are full of blessedness and of power for us. 'I will be to them a God.' We can understand

something of what that name signifies; and all that is enlisted for us. There is much which that name signifies that we do not understand, and all that, too, is working on our side.

Now, remember, that this giving of God to us by Himself is all concentrated in one historical act. He gave Himself to us, when He spared not His only begotten Son. My text is one of the articles of the New Covenant. And what sealed and confirmed all the articles of that Covenant? The blood of Jesus Christ. It was when 'God spared not His own Son,' and when the Son spared not Himself, on that Cross of Calvary, that there came to pass the ratifying and filling out and perfecting of the ancient, typical promise, 'I will be to them a God.' *There* was the unspeakable gift in which God was given to humanity.

II. And now we have to take the giving God and make Him our God.

I need not do more than just glance for a moment at that thought, for it is familiar enough to us all. Here is a treasure of gold lying in the road. Anybody that picks it up may have it; the man who does not pick it up does not get it, th ugh it is there for him to lay his fingers on. Here is a river flowing past your door. You may put a pipe into it, and bring all its wealth and refreshment into your house, and use it for the quenching of your thirst, for the cleansing of your person, for the cooking of your victuals, for the watering of your gardens. And here is all the fulness of God welling past us, but Niagara may thunder close by a man's door, and he may perish of thirst. 'I will be to them a God.' What does that matter if I do not turn round and say: 'O Lord! Thou art my God'? Nothing! Beggars come to your door, and you give

them a bit of bread, and they go away, and you find it flung into the mud round the corner. God gives us Himself. I wonder how many of us have tossed the gift over the first hedge, and left it there. Yet all the while we are dying for want of it, and do not know that we are.

Brethren! you have to enclose a bit of the prairie for your very own, and put a hedge round it, and cultivate it, and you will get abundant fruits. You have to translate 'their' into the singular possessive pronoun, and say 'mine,' and put out the hand of faith, and make Him in very deed yours. Then, and only then, is this giving perfected.

III. In the third place, we have to give ourselves to God.

We begin—as our text, profoundly, with all its simplicity, begins—with an act of God to us. He enters into loving relations with me, and it is only when I am melted and encouraged by the perception and reception of these relations that there comes the answering throb in my heart. The mirror in our spirit has the other one reflected upon it; then it flings back its own reflection to the parent glass. God comes first with the love that He pours over us poor creatures, and when 'we have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' then, and only then, do we throb back the reflected, ay, the kindred love. For love is the same thing in the divine heart and in my heart. In the other bonds that unite men to God, what is man's corresponds to what is God's. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness. My dependence corresponds to His sufficiency. My weak clinging answers to His strong grasp; my obedience to His commanding. But my *love* not only corresponds to, as the concave does to the

convex, but it assimilates to, and is the likeliest thing in the creature to, the love of the Creator. And so there is a parallel, wonderful and blessed, between the giving love which says 'I will be to them a God,' and the recipient love which responds, 'We are to Thee a people.'

Remember, too, that not only is there this general resemblance, but that our love manifests itself to God —I was going to say, just as God's love manifests itself to us, though, of course, there are differences that I do not need to touch upon here, in the act of self-surrender. He gave Himself to us. Ay! and we may use another form of speech still more emphatic, and say, He gave up Himself. For, surely, difficult as it may be for us to keep our footing in those lofty heights where the atmosphere is so rare, the gift of Jesus Christ was surrender; when the Father spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

And, brethren, what is the surrender of the man who receives the love of God? In what region of my nature is that giving up of myself most imperative and blessed? In my will. The will is the man. The centre-point of every human being is the will, and it is no use for us to talk about our having given ourselves to God, in response and in thankfulness to His gift of Himself to us, unless we come and say 'Lord! not my will, but Thine'; and bow ourselves in unreluctant and constant submission to His commandments, and to all His will. Brethren, we give ourselves to God when, moved by His giving of Himself to us, we yield up our love to Him, and love never rests until it has yielded up its will to the beloved. He, indeed, gives, asking for nothing; but He gives in a still deeper sense, asking for everything; and that every-

thing is myself. And I yield myself to Him in the measure in which I set my thankful love upon Him, and then bow myself as His servant, in humble consecration to Himself, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

IV. Lastly, God takes us for His.

'They shall be My people.' That is wonderful. It is strange that we can imitate God, in a certain fashion, in the gift of self; but it is yet more strange and blessed that God accepts that gift, and counts it as one of His treasures to possess us. One of the psalmists had a deep insight into the miracle of the divine condescension when he said 'He was extolled with *my* tongue.' Strange that the loftiest of creatures should be lifted higher by the poor tremulous lever of *my* praises! and yet He is so. He takes as His, such poor creatures, full of imperfection, and tremulous faith, and disproved love, as you and I know ourselves to be, and He says 'My people.' 'They shall be Mine,' My jewels, says He, 'in the day which I make.' Oh, brethren! it sometimes seems to me that it is more wonderful that God should take me for His, than that He should give me Himself for mine.

Have you given yourself to Him? Have you begun where He begins, taking first the gift that is freely given to you of God, even Jesus Christ, in whom God dwells, and who makes all the Godhead yours, for your very own? Have you taken God for yours, by faith in that Lord 'who loved me, and gave Himself for me?' And then smitten by His love and having the chains of self melted by the fire of His great mercy, have you said, 'Lo! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds'? Dear brethren, you never own yourselves till you give yourselves away; and you never will give

yourselves to God, to be His, unless with all your heart and strength you cling to the rock-truth, that God has given Himself to every man who will take Him, in Jesus Christ, to be that man's God for ever and ever.

III. 'ALL SHALL KNOW ME'

'They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.'—HEB. viii. 11.

IN former sermons I have tried to bring out the force of the preceding two articles of 'the New Covenant.' These two were the substitution of inward inclination and impulse for the rigid bonds of an external commandment, and the substitution of a real, spiritual, mutual possession of God and His people for the mere outward relationship that existed between Israel and Jehovah. My text is the third article of the New Covenant. It lays hold, like the other two, of something that characterised the ancient dispensation, declares its imperfection, recognises its prophetic aspect, and asserts that all which the former merely shadowed and foretold is accomplished in Jesus Christ.

In old days there had been some direct communication between God and a chosen few, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation, and they spake the things that they had heard of God to the multitude who had had no such communication. My text says that all this is swept away, and that the prerogative of every Christian man is direct access to, communication with, and instruction from, God Himself. The text has two things in it; the promise, which is the essence of it, and a consequence which is deduced from that promise, and sets forth its

results in a graphic manner. 'They all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest'; that is the real promise. 'They shall no more teach every man his neighbour . . . saying, Know the Lord,' is but a result thereof.

I. Now, I ask you to look with me at what this great promise means.

'They shall know Me.' Perhaps I can best explain what I take it to mean by commencing with an analogy or two which may help us to apprehend what is the significance of these words. We all know the difference between hearsay and sight. We may have read books of travel, and tell of some scene of great natural beauty or historic interest, and may think that we understand all about it, but it is always an epoch when our own eyes look for the first time at the snowy summit of an Alp, or for the first time at the Parthenon on its rocky height. We all know the difference between hearsay and experience. We read books of the poets that portray love and sorrow, and the other emotions that make up our throbbing, changeful life; but we need to go through the mill ourselves before we understand what the grip of the iron teeth of the harrow of affliction is, and we need to have had our own hearts dilated by a true and blessed affection, before we know the sweetness of love. Men may tell us about it, but we have to feel it ourselves before we know.

To come still closer to the force of my text, we all know the difference between hearing about a man and making his acquaintance. We may have been told much about him, and be familiar with his character, as we think, but, when we come face to face with him, and actually for ourselves experience the magnetism of his presence, or fall under the direct influence of his

character, then we know that our former acquaintance with him, by means of hearsay, was but superficial and shadowy. 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee.' Can you say that? If so, you understand my text—'They shall no more teach every man . . . his brother, saying, Know the Lord, and make acquaintance with Him' as if He were a stranger—for 'all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.'

There is all the difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God; just the difference that there is between dogma and life, between theology and religion. We may have all articles of the Christian creed clear in our understandings, and may owe our possession of them to other people's teaching; we may even, in a sense, believe them, and yet they may be absolutely outside of our lives, and it is only when they pass into the very substance of our being, and influence the springs of our conduct—it is only then that we know God.

Now, I maintain that this acquaintance with Him is what is meant in our text. It may not include any more intellectual propositions about Him than a man had before he knew Him, but it has turned doctrines into fact, and instead of the mere hearsay and traditional religion, which is the only religion of millions, it has brought the true heart-grasp of Him, which is the only thing worth calling a knowledge of God. For let me remind you that, whilst we may know a science or proposition by the exercise of our understandings in appropriate ways, that is not how we know people. And God is a person, and to know Him does not mean to understand *about* Him, but to be on speaking terms with Him, to have a familiar acquaintance with Him,

to 'summer and winter' with Him, and so, by experience, to verify the things that before were mere doctrines. Now, at least the large majority of you call yourselves believers in Christianity. I want you to ask yourselves, and I would ask myself, whether my religion is knowing *about* God or knowing Him; whether it is all made up of a set of truths which I assent to, mainly because I am not sufficiently interested in them to contradict them, or whether these truths have become the very substance of my life. I do not believe in a religion without a dogma—I was going to say, I believe still less in a dogma without religion; and that is the Christianity of hosts of professing Christians. It is as useless as are the dried seeds that rattle in the withered head of a poppy in the autumn, or as the shrivelled kernel that sounds in the hollowness of a half-empty nut.

Remember, dear brethren, that to know God is to become acquainted with Him, and that only on the path of such familiar, friendly, loving intercourse and communion with Him, can men find the confirmation of the truths about Him which make up the eternal revelation of Him in the gospel. 'We know'—that is a valid certainty, arising from experience, and it has as good a right to call itself knowledge as have the processes by which men come to be sure about the physical facts of this material universe. Nay! I would even go further, and say that the fact that such a continual stream of witnesses, through all the generations, have been able to say, 'I have tasted and I have seen that God is good,' is to be taken into account by all impartial searchers after truth. And if men want to square their creeds with all the facts of humanity, let them not omit, in their consideration of the claims

of Christian evidence, this fact, that from generation to generation men have said, and their lives have witnessed to its truths, 'We know in whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep us. We know that we are of God.' Dear brethren! the whole case for Christianity cannot be appreciated from outside. 'Taste and see.' My text shows us the more true way. If we will accept that covenant we shall know the Lord in the depths of our hearts.

II. Notice how far this promise extends.

'They all, from the least to the greatest, shall know.' There is to be no distinction of rank or age, or endowment, which shall result in some of the people of God having a position from which any of the others are altogether shut out.

The writer is, of course, contrasting in his mind, though he does not express the contrast, the condition of things of old, when, as I said, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation received communications which they then imparted to their fellows. In the morning dawn the highest summits catch the rays first, but as the sun rises it floods the lower levels, and at mid-day shines right down into the depths of the cavities. So the world is now flooded with the light of Christ; and all Christian men and women, by virtue of their Christian character, do possess the unction from the Holy One, in which lie the potency and the promise of the knowledge of all things that are needful to be known for life and godliness. This is the true democracy of the gospel—the universal possession of the life of Christ through the Spirit.

Now, if that be so, then it is by no means a truth to be kept simply for the purpose of fighting against ecclesiastical or sacerdotal encroachments and denials

of it, but it ought to be taken as the candle of the Lord, by each of us, and in the light of it we ought to search very rigidly, and very often, our own Christian character and experiences. You, dear brethren, with whom I am most closely associated here, you professing Christians of this congregation—do you know anything about that inward knowledge of God which comes from friendship with Him, and speaks irrefragable certainties in the heart which receives it? 'If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' If you owe all your knowledge of, and your faith in, the great verities of the gospel, and the loving personality of God, to the mere report of others, if you cannot verify these by your own experience, if you cannot say, 'Many things I know not; you can easily puzzle me with critical and philosophical subtleties, but this one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see'—if you cannot say that, I pray you, bethink yourselves whether your religion is not mainly a form, and how far it has any life in it at all.

But whilst thus the great promise of my text, in its very blessedness and fulness, does carry with it some solemn suggestions for searching self-examination, it also points in another direction. For consider what it excludes and what it permits, in the way of brotherly help and guidance. It certainly excludes on the one hand, all assumption of authority over the consciences and the understandings of Christian people, on the part either of churches or individuals, and it makes short work of all claims that there continues a class of persons officially distinguished from their brethren, and having closer access to God than they. The true understanding of these words of my text, the recognition of the universality of the knowledge of God in all Christian

people, has great revolutionary work yet to do amongst the churches of Christendom. For I do not know that there are any of them that have sufficiently recognised this principle. Not only in a church where there is a priesthood and an infallible head of the Church on earth, nor only in churches that are bound by human creeds imposed on them by men, but also in churches like ours, where there is no formal recognition of either of these two errors, the practical contradiction of this article of the New Covenant is apt to creep in. It is a great deal more the fault of the people than of the priest, a great deal more the fault of the congregation than of the pastor, when they are lazily contented to take all their religion at second-hand from him, and to shuffle all the responsibility off their own shoulders on to his. If my text obliges me, and all men who stand in my position, to say with the Apostle, 'Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy,' it obliges you, dear brethren, to take nothing from me, or any man, on our bare words, nor to exalt any of us into a position which would contradict the great principle of my text, but yourselves, at first hand, to go to God, and get straight from Him the teaching which He only can give. Dominion and subjection, authority and submission to men, in any part of the church are shut out by such words as these.

But brotherly help is not shut out. If a party of men are climbing a hill, and one is in advance of his fellows, when he reaches the summit he may look down and call to those below, and tell them how fair and wide the view is, and beckon them to come and give them a helping hand up. So, because Christian men vary in the extent to which they possess and utilise the one gift of knowledge of God, and some of them are in advance

of the others, it is all in accordance with the principle of my text that they that are in advance should help their brethren, and give them a brotherly hand. Not as if my brother's word can give me the inward knowledge of God, but it may help me to get that knowledge for myself. We—I speak now as a member of the preaching class—we can but do what the friend of the bridegroom does; he brings the bride to her lover, and then he shuts the door and leaves the two to themselves. That is all that any of us can do. You must yourself draw the water from the well of salvation. We can only tell you, 'there *is* the well, and the water is sweet.'

III. Lastly, the means by which this promise is fulfilled.

I have already pointed out, in previous sermons, that the conception of the gospel as a new covenant was endorsed by Jesus Christ Himself in words which tell us how all these blessings that are set forth in this context are secured and brought to men, when in the institution of the Lord's Supper, He spoke of 'the New Covenant in His blood.' So I set first and foremost, above all other means, this one great truth, that all this inward knowledge of God, which is the prerogative of every Christian man, is made possible and actual for any of us, only by and through the mission, and especially the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. For therein does He set forth God to be known as nothing else but that supreme suffering and supreme self-surrender upon the Cross, ever can do or has done. We know God as He would have us know Him, only when we see Jesus suffering and dying for us; and then adoringly, as one in the presence of a mystery into which he can but look a little way, say that even there

and then 'he that hath seen that Christ hath seen the Father.'

Jesus Christ's blood, the seal of the Covenant, is the great means by which this promise is fulfilled, inasmuch as in that death He sweeps away all the hindrances which bar us out from the knowledge of God. The great dark wall of my sin rises between me and my Father. Christ's blood, like some magic drops upon a fortification, causes all the black barrier to melt away like a cloud; and the access to the throne of God is patent, even for sinful creatures like us. The veil is rent, and by that blood we have access into the holiest of all.

Christ is the source of this knowledge of God, inasmuch, further, as by His mission and death there is given to the whole world, if it will receive it, and to all who exercise faith in His name, the gift of that Divine Spirit who teaches to our inmost spirit the true knowledge of His Son.

And so, dear brethren, since it is in the incarnate and dying Christ that all knowledge of God is brought to men, that all possibility of friendship and communion between men and God is rooted, and that the Divine Spirit who leads us into the deep things of God is granted to each of us, there follows the plain conclusion that the one way by which every man and woman on earth may find him and herself included within that 'all, from the least to the greatest,' is simply trust in Christ Jesus, in whom, in whose life, in whose death, God is made known, our alienation is swept away, and the Spirit of God, the Divine Teacher, is granted to us all.

Only, remember that my text stands in close connection with the preceding articles of this covenant, and

that to delight in the law of the Lord is the sure way to know more of the Lord. One act of obedience from the heart will teach us more of God than all the sages can. It is more illuminating simply to do as He willed than to read and think and speculate and study. 'If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.' And mutual possession of God by us, and of us by God, leads to fuller knowledge. To possess God is to love Him; and 'he that loveth knoweth God, yea! rather is known of God.'

So, dear brethren, do not be content with traditional religion, with a hearsay Christianity. 'Acquaint now thyself with Him,' and be at peace. Oh! there is nothing sweeter to a true preacher of Christ and His salvation than that those to whom he preaches should be able to do without him. It is my business to point you away from myself, however much I prize your love and confidence, as I ought to do; and to beseech you, for your own soul's sake, that you would by faith in Christ attain that knowledge of the only true God which He is sent to give. Then you will be able to say, 'Now, we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

IV. FORGIVENESS THE FUNDAMENTAL BLESSING

'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.'—HEB. viii. 12.

WE have been considering, in successive sermons, the great promises preceding my text, which are the articles of the New Covenant. We reach the last of

these in this discourse. It is last in order of enumeration because it is first in order of fulfilment. The foundation is dug down to and discovered last, because the stones of it were laid first. The introductory 'for' in my text shows that the fulfilment of all the preceding great promises depends upon and follows the fulfilment of this, the greatest of them. Forgiveness is the keystone of the arch. Strike it out, and the whole tumbles into ruin. Forgiveness is the first gift to be received from the great cornucopiæ of blessings which the gospel brings for men. The writer is tracing the stream upwards, and therefore he comes last to that which first gushes out from the divine heart. All these previous promises of delight in the law of the Lord, mutual possession between God and His people, knowledge of God which is based upon love, are consequences of this final article, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more.'

I. So, then, we remark, first, that forgiveness deals with man's deepest need.

It is fundamental, because it grapples with the true evil of humanity, which is not sorrow, but is sin. All men have 'come short of the glory of God,' and that fact, the fact of universal sinfulness, is the gravest fact of man's condition; for it affects his whole nature, and it disturbs and perverts all his relations to God. And so, if men would rightly diagnose the disease of humanity, they must recognise something far deeper than skin-deep symptoms, and discover that it is sin which is the source of all human misery and sorrow. To deal with humanity and to forget or ignore the true source of all the misery in the world—namely, the fact that we 'have all sinned and come short of the glory of God'—

is absurd. 'Miserable comforters are ye all,' if pottering over the patient, you apply ointment to pimples when he is dying of cancer. I know, of course, that a great deal may be done, and that a great deal is to-day being done, to diminish the sum of human wretchedness; and I am not the man to say one word that shall seem to under-estimate or pour cold water upon any of these various schemes of improvement—philanthropic, social, economic, or political; but I do humbly venture to say that any of them, and all of them put together, if they do not grapple with this fact of man's sin, are dealing with the surface and leaving the centre untouched. Sin does not come only from ignorance, and therefore it cannot be swept away by knowledge. It does not come only from environment, and therefore it cannot be taken out of human history by improvement of circumstances. It does not come from poverty, and therefore economical changes will not annihilate it. The root of it lies far deeper than any of these things. The power which is to make humanity blessed must dig down to the root and grasp that, and tear it up, and eject it from the heart of man before society can be thoroughly healed.

Now, what does Christianity do with this central part of human experience? My text tells us partly, and only partly, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' Of course, the divine oblivion is a strong metaphor for the treatment of man's sins as non-existent. It is the same figure, in a somewhat different application, as is found in the great promise, 'I will cast their sins behind My back into the depths of the sea.' It is the same metaphor as is suggested in a somewhat different application, by the other saying, 'Blessed

is the man whose sin is covered.' And the fact that underlies the metaphors of forgetfulness or burying in the ocean depths, or covering over so as to be invisible, is just this, that God's love flows out to the sinful man, unhindered by the fact of his transgression.

If Christian people, and doubters about Christian truth, would understand the depth and loftiness of the Christian idea of forgiveness, there would be less difficulty felt about it. For pardon is not the same thing as the removal of the consequences of wrong-doing. It is so in regard of the mere outward judicial procedure of nations, but it is not so in the family. A father often pardons, and says that he does so before he punishes, and it is the same with God. The true notion and essence of forgiveness, as the Bible conceives it, is not the putting aside of consequences, but the flow of the Father's heart to the erring child.

Sin is a great black dam, built up across the stream, but the flood of love from God's heart rises over it, and pours across it, and buries it beneath the victorious, full waters of the 'river of God.' Here is a world wrapped in mist, and high above the mist the unbroken sunshine of the divine love pours down upon the upper layer, and thins and thins and thins it until it disappears, and the full sunshine floods the rejoicing world, and the ragged fragments of the mist melt into the blue. 'I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy transgressions.' The outward consequences of forgiven sin may have to be reaped. If a man has lived a sensuous life, no repentance, no forgiveness, will prevent the drunkard's hand from trembling, or cure the corrugations of his liver. If a man has sinned, no divine forgiveness will ever take the memory of his transgressions, nor their effects, out of

his character. But the divine forgiveness may so modify the effects as that, instead of past sin being a source of torment or a tyrant which compels to future similar transgressions, pardoned sin will become a source of lowly self-distrust, and may even tend to increase in goodness and righteousness. When bees cannot remove some corruption out of the hive they cover it over with wax, and then it is harmless, and they can build upon it honey-bearing cells. Thus it is possible that, by pardon, the consequences which must be reaped may be turned into occasions for good.

But the act of the divine forgiveness does annihilate the deepest and the most serious consequences of my sin; for hell is separation from God, the sense of discord and alienation between Him and me; and all these are swept away.

So here is the foundation blessing, which meets man's deepest need. And be sure of this, that any system which cannot grapple with that need will never avail for the necessities of a sinful world. Unless our new evangelists can come to us with as clear an utterance as this of my text, they will work their enchantments in vain; and the world will be the old, sad, miserable world, after all that they can do.

II. This forgiveness is attained through Christ, and through Him only.

I have tried to show in former sermons, that the whole of these promises of what our writer calls 'the New Covenant,' are, as our Lord Himself said, sealed 'in His blood.' And that is especially true in reference to this promise of forgiveness. It is in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus alone, that that pardon which my text speaks of is secured to men.

I need not dwell upon the Scriptural statements to

this effect, but I desire to emphasise this thought, that the Christian teaching of forgiveness is based upon the conception of Christ's work and especially of Christ's death, as being the atonement for the world's sin. It is because, and only because, 'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree,' that the full-toned gospel proclamation can be rung out to men, that God 'remembers their transgressions no more.' Unless that foundation be firmly laid in the New Testament conception of the meaning and power of the death of Christ, I know not where there is a basis for the proclamation to man of divine forgiveness.

Of course, my text itself does show that the very common misrepresentation of the New Testament evangelical teaching about this matter is a misrepresentation. It is often objected to that teaching that it alleges that Christ's sacrifice effected a change in the divine heart and disposition, and made God love men whom He did not love before. The mighty 'I will' of my text makes no specific reference to Christ's death, and rather implies what is the true relation between the love of God and the death of Jesus Christ, that God's love was the originating cause, of which Christ's death was the redeeming effect. 'He so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should . . . have eternal life.' And no wise evangelical teacher ever has asserted, or does assert, anything else than that the mission of Jesus Christ is the consequence, and not the cause, of the Father's love to sinful men.

But that being kept distinctly in view, I suppose I need not remind you how, like the strand that runs through the cables of the Royal Navy, the red thread of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world runs through

the whole of the New Testament. It is fashionable nowadays to say that no theory of the atonement is needed in order that men should receive the benefit of Christ's work. That is partially true, in so far as that no human conceptions will exhaust the fulness of that great work, nor can penetrate to all its depths. But it is not true, as I humbly take it, inasmuch as if a man is to get the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, he must have this theory, that 'Christ died *for our sins* according to the Scriptures.' And that is the teaching of the whole New Testament.

I need not remind you how all Paul's writing is saturated with it, but I may remind you that to people who were very lynx-eyed critics of him and of his teaching, he said, about that very statement that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—'whether it were they or I, so we preach.' And his appeal to the consensus and unanimity of the apostles is amply vindicated by the documents that still remain. We are told that there are types of teaching in the New Testament. There are, and very beautifully they vary, and very harmoniously they blend. But there are no diversities in regard to this matter. If Paul says, 'In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins,' Peter says, 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree'; and John says, 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world.' And if, as I believe, the Book of the Revelation is his, the vision that John saw in the heavens was the vision of 'a Lamb as it had been slain'; and the song which he heard rising from immortal lips was of praise unto Him that 'hath loosed us from our sins by His own blood.'

'So they preached.' God grant that it may be true

of all of us; 'so we believe.' For, brethren, this clear, certain statement of the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the characteristic glory of the whole revelation. Without it, apart from Him and His Cross, I do not know how the hope of forgiveness can be more than dim and doubtful. I know not how any man that has once felt the grip of evil on his inclinations, and the responsibility and guilt which he has drawn down upon his head by his transgressions, can find a firm footing for his assurance of pardon, apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ. Without that, the divine forgiveness is but a peradventure, sometimes a hope, sometimes an illusion. The men that reject Christianity for the most part proclaim the gospel of despair. 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' in such a sense as to annihilate the possibility of pardon. But in Christ we understand that we may reap these fruits, and yet be pardoned. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Forgiveness apart from Christ stands, as it seems to me, in no intelligible relation to the divine character. And, apart from Christ, forgiveness is apt to dwindle down, and to be degraded into mere lazy tolerance of evil, and to make God a good-natured, indifferent Sovereign, who does not so very much mind whether His subjects do His will or not.

But when we can say, 'He died for my sins,' then we can see that the divine righteousness and the divine love are but two names for one thing, and forgiveness lifts us into a region of higher purity. Christianity alone teaches the loftiest ideal of human righteousness, the loftiest conception of the divine character, the absolute inflexibility of the divine law and withal full, free pardon. It stands alone in the sombre aspect

under which it contemplates humanity, and the boundless hope of its possibilities which it entertains. It stands alone in that forgiveness is the means to higher holiness; and in that, pardoning, it heals, and whispers 'Go thy way; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.' Therefore is it a gospel; therefore is it the New Covenant in His blood.

III. Lastly, this forgiveness is fundamental to all other Christian blessings.

As I have said, the very structure of our text shows that that was the writer's idea. There can be no 'delight in the law of the Lord,' which is the first of the articles of the New Covenant, until there is the taking away of the sin which deepens aversion to God's law, and until the Lawgiver has become beloved for the sake of His received forgiveness. Then we shall delight in the law when we love the lips that proclaim it, because before they issued commandments they decreed absolution, and declared 'Neither do I condemn thee.'

Forgiveness precedes the second of these covenant blessings—viz., mutual possession between God and His people. For so long as there remains unforgiven sin in a man's heart, it comes like a film of atmospheric air or grains of dust between two polished metal plates, forbidding their adhesion; and only when it is taken away will they come together and abide united. It lies at the foundation of, and must precede, all that true knowledge of God, which is the third of the articles of the covenant, and is a consequence of love and communion. 'For how can two walk together except they be agreed?' Until my sin is taken from me the eyes of my soul are dim; and I know not God in deep reciprocal possession and continual love. And so with all other of

the blessings and the hopes which Christian men are entitled to cherish by reason of this covenant of God's changeless love.

I need not dwell upon them, but I would leave with you these thoughts. A Christianity which does not begin with the proclamation of forgiveness is impotent. Again, a Christianity which does not base forgiveness on Christ's sacrifice is also impotent. The history of the Church shows that preachers and teachers and churches that do not know what to say when a poor soul comes to them and asks, 'What must I do to be saved?' are of no use, or next to none The man in whom there are devils says to such maimed representations of the gospel, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' and leaps upon them, and overcomes them. The whole experience of the past demonstrates that. And so one laments the vagueness and the faltering in proclaiming this truth so common in this day. Brethren, I, for my part, believe that the only type of Christianity which will win men's hearts is that modelled on the pattern of the New Testament teaching, which begins with the fact of sin, and, having dealt with that, then goes on to bestow all other blessings.

But do not forget another thing, that a Christianity which does not build holiness, delight in God's law, conscious possession of Him and possession by Him, and deep, blessed knowledge of Him, on forgiveness, is wofully imperfect. And that is the Christianity of a great many of us. Here is the first round of the ladder: 'I will remember their iniquities no more.' Put your foot upon that and then begin to ascend; and do not stop till you have reached the top, whence His face looks down, and whence you can step on to the stable standing-ground beside His very throne. Begin

with forgiveness, and all these blessings shall be added unto you, if you keep the covenant of your God.

THE PRIEST IN THE HOLY PLACE

'But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others: 26. (For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world:) but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.'—HEB. ix. 11-14, 24-28.

SPACE forbids attempting full treatment of these pregnant verses. We can only sum up generally their teaching on the priesthood of Jesus.

I. Christ, as the high priest of the world, offers Himself. Obviously verse 14 refers to Christ's sacrificial death, and in verse 26 His 'sacrifice of Himself' is equivalent to His 'having suffered.' The contention that the priestly office of Jesus begins with His entrance into the presence of God is set aside by the plain teaching of this passage, which regards His death as the beginning of His priestly work. What, then, are the characteristics of that offering, according to this writer? The point dwelt on most emphatically is that He is both priest and sacrifice. That great thought opens a wide field of meditation, for adoring thankfulness and love. It implies the voluntariness of His death. No necessity bound Him to the Cross. Not the nails, but His love, fastened Him there. Himself He

would not save, because others He would save. The offering was 'through the Eternal Spirit,' the divine personality in Himself, which as it were, took the knife and slew the human life. That sacrifice was 'without blemish,' fulfilling in perfect moral purity the prescriptions of the ceremonial law, which but clothe in outward form the universal consciousness that nothing stained or faulty is worthy to be given to God. What are the blessings brought to us by that wondrous self-sacrifice? They are stated most generally in verse 26 as the putting away of sin, and again in verse 28 as being the bearing of the sins of many, and again in verse 14 as cleansing conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now the first of these expressions includes the other two, and expresses the blessed truth that, by His death, Jesus has made an end of sin, in all its shapes and powers, whether it is regarded as guilt or burden, or taint and tendency paralysing and disabling. Sin is guilt, and Christ's death deals with our past, taking away the burden of condemnation. Thus verse 28 presents Him as bearing the sins of many, as the scapegoat bore the sins of the congregation into a land not inhabited, as 'the Lord made to meet' on the head of the Servant 'the iniquities of us all.' The best commentary on the words here is, 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' But sin has an effect in the future as in the past, and the death of Christ deals with that. So verse 14 parallels it not only with the sacrifice which made access to God possible, but with the ceremonial of the red heifer,' by which pollution from touching a corpse was removed. A conscience which has been in contact with 'dead works' (and all works which are not done from 'the life' are so) is unfit to serve God, as well as lacking in wish to serve; and the

only way to set it free from the nightmare which fetters it is to touch it with 'the blood,' and then it will spring up to a waking life of glad service. 'The blood' is shed to take away guilt; 'the blood' is the life, and, being shed in the death, it can be transfused into our veins, and so will cleanse us from all sin. Thus, in regard both to past and future, sin is put away by the sacrifice of Himself. The completeness of His priestly work is further attested by the fact, triumphantly dwelt on in the lesson, that it is done once for all, and needs no repetition, and is incapable of repetition, while the world lasts.

II. Christ, as the high priest of the world, passes into heaven for us. The priest's office of old culminated in his entrance into the Holy of Holies, to present the blood of sacrifice. Christ's priesthood is completed by His ascension and heavenly intercession. We necessarily attach local ideas to this, but the reality is deeper than all notions of place. The passage speaks of Jesus as 'entering into the holy place,' and again as entering 'heaven itself for us.' It also speaks of His having entered 'through the greater and more perfect tabernacle,' the meaning of which phrase depends on the force attached to 'through.' If it is taken locally, the meaning is as in chapter iv. 14, that He has passed through the [lower] heavens to 'heaven itself'; if it is taken instrumentally (as in following clause), the meaning is that Jesus used the 'greater tabernacle' in the discharge of His office of priest. The great truth underlying both the ascension and the representations of this context is, as verse 24 puts it, that He appears 'before the face of God,' and there carries on His work, preparing a place for us. Further, we note that Jesus, as priest representing humanity, and being Himself man,

can stand before the face of God, by virtue of His sacrifice, in which man is reconciled to God. His sinless manhood needed no such sacrifice, but, as our representative, He could not appear there without the blood of sacrifice. That blood, as shed on earth, avails to 'put away sin'; as presented in heaven, it avails 'for us,' being ever present before the divine eye, and influencing the divine dealings. That entrance is the climax of the process by which He obtained 'eternal redemption' for us. Initial redemption is obtained through His death, but the full, perfect unending deliverance from all sin and evil is obtained, indeed, by His passing into the Holy Place above, but possessed in fact only when we follow Him thither. We need Him who 'became dead' for pardon and cleansing; we need Him who is 'alive for evermore' for present participation in His life and present sitting with Him in the heavenly places, and for the ultimate and eternal entrance there, whence we shall go no more out.

III. Christ, as the high priest of the world, will come forth from the holy place. The ascension cannot end His connection with the world. It carries in itself the prophecy of a return. 'If I go, . . . I will come again.' The high priest came forth to the people waiting for him, so our High Priest will come. Men have to die, and 'after death,' not merely as following in time, but as necessarily following in idea and fact, a judgment in which each man's work shall be infallibly estimated and manifested. Jesus has died 'to bear the sins of many.' There must follow for Him, too, an estimate and manifestation of His work. What for others is 'judgment,' for Him is manifestation of His sinlessness and saving power. He shall be seen, no longer stooping under the weight of a world's sins, but 'apart from

sin.' He shall be seen 'unto salvation,' for the vision will bring with it assimilation to His sinless likeness. He shall be thus seen by those that wait for Him, looking through the shows of time to the far-off shining of His coming, and meanwhile having their loins girt and their lamps burning.

THE ENTHRONED CHRIST

'This man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.'—HEB. x. 12.

To that tremendous assertion the whole New Testament is committed. Peter, Paul, John, the writer of this book—all teach that the Jesus who died on Calvary now sits at the right hand of God. This is no case of distance casting a halo round the person of a simple teacher, for six weeks after Calvary, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that Jesus, 'exalted at the right hand of God,' had 'shed forth this,' the gift of that Divine Spirit. This is no case of enthusiastic disciples going beyond their Master's teaching, for all the evangelists who record our Lord's trial before the Sanhedrin concur in saying that the turning-point of it, which led to His condemnation, was the declaration, 'Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power.' The rulers interpreted the assertion to mean an assertion of divinity, and therefore condemned Him to death. Christ was silent, and the silence witnessed that they interpreted His meaning aright. So, then, for good or evil, we have Jesus making the tremendous assertion, which His followers but repeated. Let us try to look at these words, and draw from them some of the rich fulness of their

meaning. Communion, calm repose, participation in divine power and dominion, and much besides, are implied in this great symbol. And I desire to dwell upon the various aspects of it for a few moments now.

I. Here we have the attestation of the completeness, the sufficiency, and the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice.

Look at the context. Mark the strong words which immediately precede the last clause of my text. 'This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' The writer has just been arguing that all Jewish sacrifice, which he regarded as being of divine appointment, was inadequate, and derived its whole importance from being a prophetic shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And he points, first, in proof of his thesis, to the entire disparity of the two things—the taking away of sin, and the blood of bulls and of goats. And then he adds a subsidiary consideration, saying in effect, 'The very fact that day after day the sacrifices are continued, shows that they had no power to do the thing for which they were offered—viz., to quiet consciences.' For, if the consciences were quieted, then the sacrifice would cease to be offered. And so he draws a sharp contrast between the priests who stand daily ministering and 'offering oftentimes the same sacrifice,' which by their very repetition are demonstrated to be inadequate to effect their purpose, and Jesus. Instead of these priests standing, offering, and doing over and over again their impotent sacrifices, 'this Man' offered His once. That was enough, and for ever. And the token that the one sacrifice was adequate, really could take away sin, would never, through all the rolling ages of the world's history, lose its efficacy, lies here—He sits at the right hand of God.

Brethren, in that session, which the Lord Himself commanded us to believe, is the divine answer and endorsement of the triumphant cry upon the Cross, 'It is finished,' and it is God's last, loudest, and ever-reverberating proclamation to all the world, in all its generations, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

Do you think of Christ's mission and Christ's work as this writer thought of it, finding the vital centre in its sacrificial efficacy, seeing it as being mainly a work caused by, in relation to, and victorious over, man's sin and my sin, and as attested as sufficient for all sin, for the sins of the world, in all generations, by the fact that, having offered it once, the High Priest, as this same writer says in another place, sat at the right hand of God? These two things, the high Scriptural notion of the essential characteristic and efficacy of Christ's work as being sacrificial, and the high Scriptural notion of His present session at the right hand of God; these two things are correlated and bound inseparably together. If you only think of Jesus Christ as being a great teacher, a blessed example, the very flower and crown of immaculate humanity, if you listen to His words, and rejoice over the beauty of His character, but do not see that *the* thing which He, and He alone, does, is to deal with the tremendous reality of human transgression, and to annihilate it, both in regard of its guilt and of its power, then the notion of His session at the right hand of God becomes surplusage and superstition. But if we see, as I pray God that we may each see for ourselves, that when He came, He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and that even that does not exhaust the significance of His Person, and the purpose of His

mission, but that He came 'to give His life a ransom for many,' then, oh! then, when my conscience asks in agony, 'Is there a way of getting rid of my transgressions?' and when my weak will asks, in tremulous indecision, 'Is there a way by which I can shake off the tyranny of this usurping evil power that has fixed its claws in my character and my habits?' then I turn and look to the Christ enthroned at the right hand of power, and I say, 'This Man has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'; and there, in that calm session at God's right hand, is the attestation that His sacrifice is complete, is sufficient, and is perpetual.

II. We have here the revelation of our Lord's calm repose.

That is expressed, of course, by the very attitude in which, in the symbol, He is represented. Away down in the Egyptian desert there sit, moulded in colossal calm, two giant figures, with hands laid restfully in their laps, and wide-open eyes gazing out over the world. There they have sat for millenniums, the embodiment of majestic repose. So Christ 'sitteth at the right hand of God' rapt in the fulness of eternal calm. But that tranquillity is parallel with the Scriptural representation of the rest of God after creation, which neither indicates previous exhaustion nor connotes present idleness, but expresses the completion of the work and the correspondence of the reality with the ideal which was in the Maker's mind.

In like manner, as I have been trying to point out to you, Christ's rest means the completeness of His finished work, and carries along with it, as that divine rest after creation does in its region, the conception of continuous activity, for just as little as the continuous phenomena of nature can be conceived of,

apart from the immanent activity of the ever-working God, and just as the last word of all physical science is that, beneath the so-called causes and so-called forces there must lie a personal will, the only cause known to man, and preservation is a continuous creation, and the changes in nature are the result of the will of the active God, so the past work of Christ, of which He said, when He died, 'It is finished!' is prolonged into, and carried on through, the ages by the continuous activity of the ever-working Christ. 'He sitteth at the right hand of God'; and to that session may be applied in full truth what He said Himself, in the vindication of His work on the Sabbath day—'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

So the dying martyr looked up in the council chamber, and beyond the vaulted roof saw the heavens opened, and with a significant variation in the symbolical attitude, saw 'the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' The seated Christ, we might say, had sprung to His feet, in answer to the dying martyr's faith and prayer, and granted him the vision, not of calm repose, but of intensest activity for his help and sustaining.

The appendix to Mark's Gospel, in like manner, unites these two conceptions of undisturbed tranquillity and of energetic work. For he says that the Lord 'was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God, and they went . . . everywhere preaching the word.' Then did the Commander-in-chief send His soldiers out into the battlefield, and Himself retire to the safe shelter of the hill? By no means. For the two halves of the picture which look so unlike one another—the Lord seated there, and the servants wandering about and toiling here—are brought to-

gether into the one solid reality, 'they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord'—seated up yonder—'working with them.' So constant activity is the very essence and inseparable accompaniment of the undisturbed tranquillity of the seated Christ. In other places in Scripture we get the same blending together of the two ideas, as, for instance, when Paul says 'It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And in like manner, in Peter's utterance upon Pentecost, already referred to, you find the same idea. 'Being at the right hand of God exalted, He hath showed forth this which ye now see and hear.' So, working with us, working in us, working for us, working through us, the ever active Christ is with His people, and seated at the right hand of God, shares in all their labours, in all their difficulties, in all their warfare.

III. Lastly, we have here the revelation of Christ's participation in divine power and dominion.

There is a very remarkable and instructive variety in the forms of expression conveying this idea in various parts of the New Testament. We read from His own lips, 'seated at the right hand of power.' We read usually 'at the right hand of God.' We read in this Epistle 'at the right hand of the Majesty of the Highest,' and also 'at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' So you see our Lord Himself dwelt mainly on the conception of participation in power. And these other passages which I have quoted deal mainly with the conception of the participation in royal authority and dominion. And these two go together.

Then there is another observation to be made, and that

is that this sitting at God's right hand is to be interpreted as purely symbolical. For you cannot localise 'the right hand of God.' That 'right hand' is everywhere, wherever the divine power is working. So that, though I, for my part, believe that the human corporeity of Jesus Christ, with which He ascended into the heavens, does abide in a locality, it is not that localisation which is meant by this great symbol of my text, but it is the declaration of a state, rather than of a place—participation in the power that belongs to God, and not a session in a given locality.

There is another remark also to be made, and that is that, according to the full-toned belief of the Christian Church when Jesus Christ in His ascension returned to the Father, from whom He had come, He carried with Him this great difference between His then—that is to say, His present—state, and the pre-incarnate state, viz., that now He has carried into unity with the Father the glorified manhood which He assumed on earth, and there is no difference between the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and the glory in which He now sits. Humanity is thus gathered into divinity.

Now, brethren, I am not going to dwell upon these thoughts, for they go far beyond the powers of my speech; but I am bound by my own conceptions of what Christ Himself has taught us, to reiterate that here we have the plainest teaching, founded on His own express statement, that He is participant of divine fellowship, so close as that it is represented either by being in the bosom of the Father, or by sitting at the right hand of God, and that 'all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth,' so as that He is the Administrator of the universe. The hands that were

pierced with the nails, and into one of which was thrust, in mockery, the reed for a sceptre, now carry the sceptre of the universe, and He is 'King of kings and Lord of lords.' 'He sitteth at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens.'

Now all this should have a very strong practical effect upon us. 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.' Oh, brethren! if we carried with us day by day into all our difficulties and struggles, and amidst the glittering fascinations and temptations of this earthly life that great thought, and if we kept the heavens open—for we can do so—and keep before our eyes that vision, how small the difficulties, what molehills the mountains, and how void of charm the seducing temptations would then be! Christ seen—like the popular idea of the sunshine streaming down upon a coal fire—puts out the fuliginous flame of earth's temptations, and dims the kindled brightness of earth's light. And if we really, and not as a mere dogma, had incorporated this faith into our lives, how different that last moment, and what lies beyond it, would look. I do not know how it may be with others, but to me the conception of eternity is chill and awful and repellent; it seems no blessing to live *for ever*. But if we people the waste future with the one figure of the living Christ exalted for us, it all becomes different, and, like the sunrise on snowy summits, the chill heights, not to be trodden by human foot, flash up into rosy beauty that draws men's desires. 'I go to prepare a place for you'; and He prepares it by being there Himself, for then, then it becomes Home. 'And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye

may be also'—'sitting on My throne, as I overcame, and am sat down with My Father on His throne.'

PERFECTED AND BEING SANCTIFIED

'By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.'
HEB. X. 14.

IN the preceding sentence there is another 'for ever,' which refers to the sacrifice of Christ, and declares its perpetual efficacy. It is one, the world's sins are many, but the single sacrifice is more than all of them. It is a past act, but its consequences are eternal, and flow down through all the ages. The text explains wherein consists the perpetual efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, and the reason why it needs no repetition while the world lasts. It endures for ever, because it has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Now, in looking at these words, two things are noteworthy. One is the double designation here of the persons whom Christ influences by His offering, in that they are 'perfected,' and in that they are 'sanctified.' Another is the double aspect of our Lord's work here set forth in regard to time, ir. that it is, in the first part of the sentence, spoken of as a past act whose consequences endure—'He *hath* perfected'—and in the latter part of our text, according to the accurate rendering, it is spoken of as continuous and progressive, as yet incomplete and going on to perfection. For the text ought to read—'He hath perfected for ever them that are *being* sanctified.' So there you have these two things, the double view of what Christ does, 'perfects' and 'sanctifies,' and the double view of His work, in that in one aspect it is past and complete, and

in another aspect it is running on, continuous, and as yet unfinished.

I. First, then, look at the twofold aspect of the effect of Christ's sacrifice.

By it we are 'perfected,' 'sanctified.' Now, these two words, so to speak, cover the same facts, but they look at them from two different points of view. One of them looks at the completed Christian character from the human point of view, and the other looks at it from the divine. For, what does 'perfect' mean in the New Testament? It means, as many a passage might be quoted to show, 'mature,' 'full grown,' in opposition to 'babes in Christ.' This very Epistle uses the two phrases in that antithesis, but the literal meaning of the word is *that which has reached its end*, that which has attained what it was meant to be; and, according to the New Testament teaching, a man is perfected when he has all his capabilities and possibilities of progress and goodness and communion with God made into realities and facts in His life, when the bud has flowered, and the flower has fruited. When capacity is developed, privileges enjoyed, duties attended to, relationships entered into and maintained—when these things have taken place the man is perfect. It is to be observed that there is no reference in the word to any standard outside of human nature. If a man has become all that it is possible for him to be, he is, in the fullest sense, perfect. But Scripture also recognises a relative perfection, as we have already remarked, which consists in a certain maturity of Christian character, and has for its opposite the condition of 'babes in Christ.' So Paul exhorts 'as many as be perfect' to be 'thus minded'—namely, not to count themselves to have apprehended, but to

stretch forward to the things which are before, and to press towards the goal which still gleams far in advance.

Consider, now, that other description of a Christian character as 'sanctified.'

The same set of facts in a man's nature is thought of in that word, only they are looked at from another point of view. I suppose I do not need to enlarge upon the fact which, however, I am afraid a great many good people do not realise as they should, that the Biblical notion of 'saint' and 'sanctified' does not begin with character, but with relation, or, if I might put it more plainly, it does not, primarily and to start with, mean 'righteous,' but 'belonging to God.' The Old and the New Testament concur in this conception of 'sanctity,' or 'holiness,' which are the same thing, only one is a Latin word and the other a Teutonic one—namely, that it starts from being consecrated and given up to God, and that out of that consecration will come all manner of righteousness and virtues, beauties of character, and dispositions and deeds which all men own to be 'lovely . . . and of good report.' The saint is, first of all, a man who knows that he belongs to God, and is glad to belong to Him, and then, afterwards, he becomes righteous and pure and radiant, but it all starts with yielding myself to God.

So the same set of characteristics which in the word 'perfected' were considered as fulfilling the idea of manhood, as God has given it to us, are massed in this other word, and considered as being the result of our yielding ourselves to Him. That is to say, no man has reached the end which he was created and adapted to reach, unless he has surrendered himself to God. You will never be 'perfected' until you are 'sanctified.'

You must begin with consecration, and then holiness of character, and beauty of conduct, and purity of heart will all come after that. It is vain to put the cart before the horse, and to try to work at mending your characters, before you have set right your relationship to God. Begin with sanctifying, and you will come to perfecting. That is the New Testament teaching. And there is no way of getting to that perfection except, as we shall see, through the one offering.

II. In the next place notice here the completed work. 'By one offering He hath "perfected"' us, the Christian people of this generation, the Christian people yet to be born into the world, the men that have not yet learned that they belong to Him, but who will learn it some day. Were they all 'perfected' eighteen centuries ago? In what sense can that perfecting be said to be a past act? Suppose you take some purifying agent, and throw it in at the head-waters of a river, and it goes down the stream, down and down and down, and by degrees purifies it all. If you like to use long-winded words, you can say that 'potentially' the river was purified when the precipitating agent was flung into it, though its waves were still foul with impurity. Or you can put it into plainer English and say that the past act has its abiding consequences, for there has been thrown into the centre of human history, as it were, that which is amply adequate to the 'perfecting' and the 'sanctifying' of every soul of the race. And that is what the writer of this Epistle means when he says 'He *hath* perfected,' because that sacrifice, like the precipitating agent that I have spoken about, has been flung into the stream of the world's history, and has power to

make pure as the dew-drop, or as the water that flows from melting ice, every foul-smelling, darkly dyed drop of the filthy stream.

'By one offering.' Now the word that the writer employs there is a very unusual one in Scripture. He has just been using it in a previous verse, where he speaks about 'the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.' Did you ever notice that remarkable expression 'the offering of the *body*,' not as we usually read, the 'blood.' What does that mean? I think it means this, that the writer is contemplating not only the culminating sacrifice of Calvary, but Christ's offering of Himself all through His earthly life; and knitting together in one the life and the death, the totality of His work, as that by which He has 'perfected for ever all them that are being sanctified.' And that, I think, is made quite certain, because he has just been speaking, and the words of my text refer back to the declaration in one of the psalms 'Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God,' as expressing the whole meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That saying of the psalmist was fulfilled not only on the Cross but in all His daily life.

Jesus Christ, then, in His whole manifestation, in His life, but not only in His life; and in His death, but not only in His death, has offered Himself unto God, 'the Lamb without blemish, and without spot.' And in that offering culminating in the death upon the Cross, but not confined thereto, there does lie the power which is triumphantly more than adequate to deal with all the foulnesses and sins of the world, and to perfect for ever any man that attaches himself to it. It deals with our guilt as nothing else can. It speaks to our consciences as nothing else can. It takes away

all the agony and the pain, or all the dogged deadness, of a seared conscience. It deals with character. In that great offering, considered as including Christ's life as well as His death, and considered as including Christ's death as well as His life, you have folded up in indissoluble unity the pattern, the motive, and the power for all righteousness of character; and he reaches the end for which God created him, who, laying his hand on the head of that offering, not only transfers his sins to it, but receives its righteousness into him. By one offering that dealt with guilt, and wiped it all out, and that deals with the tyranny of evil, and emancipates us from it, and that communicates to us a new life formed in righteousness after the image of Him that created us, we are delivered from the burden of our sins and perfected, in so far as we lay hold of the power that is meant to cleanse us.

There is no other way of being perfected. You will never reach the point which it is possible for you to attain, and you will never fulfil the purpose for which God made you, unless you have joined yourself by faith to Jesus Christ, and are receiving into your life, and developing in your character, the power which He has lodged in the heart of humanity for redemption and purifying.

III. Now one last word. We have here the continuous and progressive work of Christ, and the growing experience of Christians.

As I have remarked, the last clause of my text would be more completely rendered if we read, 'them that are being sanctified.' The same idea is set forth by the apostle Paul in that solemn passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he speaks about the double effect of the gospel upon 'them that are perish-

ing,' and on 'them that are being saved.' In both cases there is a process going on. The same idea is brought out, too, in the other expression in the Acts of the Apostles, about the 'Lord adding to the Church daily,' not, as the Authorised Version has it, 'such as should be saved,' but 'them that were being saved.' We may speak of salvation as past, as all included in the initial act by which we are knit to Jesus Christ through faith, when as guilty sinners we come to Him and cast ourselves on Him. We may speak of salvation as being future, and lying beyond this vale of tears and battle-field of sins and sorrow. But we can speak of it more accurately than in either of these aspects, as a point in the past, prolonged into a line in the present, and running on into the future. For salvation is a process which is going on day by day, if we are right, and which I am afraid is not progressive in a very great many professing Christian people. Perfected, I said, meant full-grown. I wonder about how many of us it would need to be said, 'Ye are babes in Christ, and when for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God.' Salvation is a progressive process. That is to say, if we are truly joined to Jesus Christ, we are growingly influenced by the powers of His Cross and the gift of His Spirit. There is no limit to that growth. It is like a spiral which goes up and up and up, and in every convolution draws nearer to the centre, but never reaches it. Our hearts and spirits are wonderfully elastic. They can take in a great deal more of God than we think they can, or than they ever have taken in. We can receive just as much of that infinite Life into our finite spirits as we will. Let us each strive to get more

and more of Jesus Christ in us, that we may know Him, and the 'power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,' more fully, more deeply, and may keep it more constantly.

Oh, brethren! if we are not ascending the ladder that reaches to heaven, which is Christ Himself, we are descending; and if we are not growing we are dwindling; and if we cannot say that we are being sanctified, we are being made more and more common and profane.

I am not going to say one word about whether absolute perfection or absolute sanctification can be reached in this life. If you and I were many hundreds of miles farther on the road, it would be worth discussing whether we could reach the goal or not. Never mind about the possibilities of abstract and perfect sanctification, we are a good long way off that. Look after the next step in advance, and leave the ultimate one to take care of itself. Only remember, that whilst Christ's past work has in it perpetual and absolute power to make any man perfect, no man will be sanctified unless he is sanctified by 'faith that is in Me,' and by the effort to work into his life and character the gift of the Divine Spirit and of the life of Christ which he receives by faith. It is 'them that are being sanctified' to whom the large hopes of this great text apply, and who may be sure that one day they will be absolutely perfected.

A BETTER AND AN ENDURING SUBSTANCE

'Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.'—HEB. x. 34.

THE words 'in heaven' are probably no part of the original text, but have somehow or other crept in, in order to make more plain what some one supposed to be the reference of these words to the future inheritance of the saints. They, however, rather disturb than help the writer's thought. He is speaking of a present and not of a future possession. 'Ye have,' and not 'ye shall have,' a better and an 'enduring possession,' not in heaven, but here and now.

But even if these words be expelled from the text as disturbing the writer's thought, there still remains a variation in the reading of some importance. It is a very slight difference of form in the original, but the two meanings between which we have to choose are these: 'Knowing that ye have yourselves as a better and an enduring possession'; *or*, 'a better and an enduring possession for yourselves.' I am inclined rather to the former of the two, both from external authority and internal congruity, though the choice between them is difficult. But, if we accept this as the meaning of these words, we can gather from them important lessons, of which I ask your consideration.

I. The true possession.

If we adopt the other reading, and take the words to mean that, in so far as we are truly resting on Jesus, we have for ourselves an inheritance or possession better than all external ones, the text will then be pointing to the old thought that God is the true joy and treasure

of a man's soul. If, on the other hand, we may venture to adopt the other meaning, there is great depth and beauty in it, representing, as it does, the Christian as having himself as a treasure. It may strike one as strange, but a little consideration will show its truth and perfect harmony with the other thought, that God is the treasure of every soul which is not poor and in need of all things. 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself,' says the Book of Proverbs, and that is no arrogant denial of the need for God, but completely accords with the devout acknowledgment, 'All my springs are in Thee.' In the very same chapter as our text we read: 'We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of their souls,' which might be more accurately rendered, 'to the acquisition as their own of their souls.' Remember, too, our Lord's words: 'In your patience ye shall acquire possession of your souls.' If we take these sayings into account, we need not hesitate to admit that, at all events, there is a great deal to be said for the somewhat remarkable expression in the text.

It just comes to this. No man possesses himself until he has given up himself. We only own ourselves when we have parted with ourselves. Until we have yielded ourselves in acts of dependent faith and rejoicing love and docile obedience unto God, we have no real possession of ourselves. He, and only he, who says, 'I give myself away to Thee,' gets himself back again sanctified, gladdened, ennobled, and on the way to be perfected by his surrender and God's reception.

We own ourselves only on condition of being Christian men. For, under all other circumstances and

forms of life, the true self is domineered over and brought into slavery and dragged away from its proper bearings by storms and swarms of lusts and passions and inclinations and ambitions and senses. A man's flesh is his master, or his pride is his master, or some fraction of his nature is his master, and he himself is an oppressed slave, tyrannised over by rebellious powers. The only way to get the mastery of yourselves, to be able to keep a tight hand upon all inferior parts of your nature, and to have that self-command and self-possession without which there is nothing noble in life, is to go to God and say, 'Oh, Lord! I cannot rule this anarchic being of mine. Do Thou take it into Thine hands. Here are the reins: do with me what Thou wilt.' Then you will be your own masters, not till then. Then you will own yourselves; till then, the devil and the world and the flesh, and the pomps and prides and passions and lusts and lazinesses that are in your nature will own you. But if we have exercised the faith which casts itself wholly upon God, we therein and thereby win God and our own selves also, and that is one of the meanings of 'saving our own souls.'

Or, to put it in another light, the only things worth calling treasures and possessions are true thoughts that we have learned from God; pure affections that go out to Him; yearning desires after Him, which, in their very yearning, bear the prophecy, and are to a large extent the foretaste, of their own fruition.

These are the things that make a man's treasure. The inner life of obedience, of love, of trust, the conscience cleansed, the will made plastic and docile, the heart filled with all pure and heavenward affections, aspirations that lift us above self and time, and

bring us into the sweet and calm light of the Eternal Love whose name is God—these are the possessions which are worth possessing. And he, and only he, has such who has found them in lowly submission of his sinful self to Christ who has died that our spirits might be cleansed and given back unto us.

Brethren, the realisation of this possession of ourselves depends on our faith. Stoics and moralists and lofty souled men in all ages have talked about the true possession of oneself, which comes by self-surrender and annihilation, but Christian faith realises the dream, and they only find the reality who pass towards it through the gate of trust in Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, will the old English poet's lovely picture be fulfilled, and the man's soul

> 'Made free from slavish bands,
> Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;
> Lord of himself, though not of lands;
> And having nothing, yet hath all.'

II. Note, again, how here we hear asserted the superiority of this possession.

It is 'better' in its essential quality. That does not need many words. Surely these possessions of heart and mind and will and desires all brought into fellowship with and filled by God are things more correspondent with the nature of man and his needs than any accumulation of outward possessions can ever be. And surely it is a plain piece of prose, and no exaggerated religious enthusiasm, which says, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.' Men call it mysticism. It is the very foundation of all true religion. The apprehension of union with God is the one thing that will satisfy the

soul; the one thing that we need, which having, we cannot be wholly desolate, however dark may be our path, nor wholly solitary, however lonely may be our lot, nor utterly bereaved, however blessings may be dragged from our hands; and without which we cannot be at rest, however compassed with stays and succours and treasures and friends; nor rich, however we may have bursting coffers and all things to enjoy.

The possession which we carry within us is better than any which we can gather round us. 'Surely he is disquieted in vain, he heapeth up treasures'—and the very fact that they need to be 'heaped,' and that that is all that he can do with them, shows the vanity of the disquiet that raked them together. Not what a man has, but what a man is, is his wealth.

And the better treasure is an enduring possession. That is the second element of its excellence. These things, the calm joys, the pure delights of still fellowship with God in heart and mind and will—these things have in them no seed of decay. These cannot be separated from their possessor by anything but his own unfaithfulness. There will never come the time when they shall have to be left behind. Use does not wear these out, but strengthens and increases them. The things which are destined 'to perish with the using' belong to an inferior category. All the best things are intended and destined to increase with the using, and this treasure, the more it is expended the fuller is the coffer, and the more we exercise the love, the communion, the obedience which make our true riches, the more do the riches increase. And then, when all other things drop from their nerveless hands; and 'His glory'—whose glory was in outward things—

'shall not descend after him,' we shall carry these treasures with us wherever we go, and find that they were the pledge of immortality.

III. My text, lastly, suggests to us the quiet superiority to earthly loss and change which the possession of this treasure involves.

The writer is speaking to Christian men who have endured a great fight of afflictions, and he says of them, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, because you knew that you had this better and enduring substance.' Joyfully! When you strike away the false props the strength of the real ones becomes more conspicuous. And many and many a time we may experience, unless we waste our discipline and our sorrows, that the surest way to become richer towards God is to lose the earthly stays and supports. But whether that be so or no, he who sits in the centre, and has the light round him, need not mind much what storms are raging without, and he whose inexpugnable fortress is within the depths of God may smile at all the hubbub and confusion down in the valley. If we possess this true treasure which lies at our doors, and may be had for the taking, we shall be like men in some strong fortress, with firm walls, abundant provisions, and a well in the courtyard, and we can laugh at besiegers. 'His abiding place shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him and his water shall be made sure.' We may be quiet and lofty, infinitely above the fear of chance and change, if we keep the firm hold which we may keep of the enduring riches which God brings with Him into our souls.

Some of you may be in circumstances which make such thoughts as these specially applicable, either

because dark days may be threatening, or because the sunshine of prosperity may be dazzling some eyes and making them lose sight of their true wealth. To the one class the thought of my text is gathered up in the warning, 'Charge them that they trust not in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God.' And, to the other class, the text should quicken and consolidate the resolve, 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. Thou art the strength of my heart, and mine inheritance for ever.'

HOW TO OWN OURSELVES

'Them that believe to the saving of the soul.'—HEB. x. 39.

THE writer uses a somewhat uncommon word in this clause, which is not altogether adequately represented by the translation 'saving.' Its true force will be apparent by comparing one or two of the few instances in which it occurs in the New Testament. For example, it is twice employed in the Epistles to the Thessalonians; in one case being rendered, 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain' (or, more correctly, to *the obtaining of*) 'salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ'; and in another, 'called to the obtaining of glory through Jesus Christ.' It is employed twice besides in two other places of Scripture, and in both of these it means 'possession.' So that, though practically equivalent to the idea of salvation, there is a very beautiful shade of difference which is well worth noticing.

The thought of the text is substantially this—those who believe *win* their souls; they acquire them for their possession. We talk colloquially about 'people that cannot call their souls their own.' That is a very

true description of all men who are not lords of themselves through faith in Jesus Christ. 'They who believe to the gaining of their own souls' is the meaning of the writer here.

And I almost think that we may trace in this peculiar expression an allusion, somewhat veiled but real, to similar words of our Lord's. For He said, when, like the writer in the present context, He was encouraging His disciples to steadfastness in the face of difficulties and persecutions, 'In your patience'—in your persistent adherence to Me, whatever might draw you away,—'ye shall win'—not merely *possess*, as our Bible has it, and not a commandment, but a promise—'in your patience ye shall win your souls.' Whether that allusion be sustainable or no matters comparatively little; it is the significant and beautiful thought which underlies the word to which I wish to turn, and to present you with some illustrations of it.

I. First, then, if we *lose* ourselves we *win* ourselves.

All men admit in theory that a self-centred life is a blunder. Jesus Christ has all moralists and all thoughtful men wholly with Him when He says, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life shall find it.' There is no such way of filling a soul with enlargement and blessedness and of evolving new powers and capacities as self-oblivion for some great cause, for some great love, for some great enthusiasm. Many a woman has found herself when she held her child in her arms, and in the self-oblivion which comes from maternal affections and cares has sprung into a loftier new life. Many a heart, of husband and wife, can set its seal to this truth, that the blessedness of love is that it decentralises the soul, and substitutes another aim for the wretched and narrow one that is

involved in self-seeking. And even if we do not refer to these sacred heights of maternal or of wedded love, there are many other noble counterpoises to the degrading influence of self-absorption, which all men recognise and some men practise. Whoever has once tasted the joy and rapture of flinging himself into some great enthusiasm, and has known how much fuller life is when so inspired than in its ordinary forms, needs no words to convince him that the secret of blessedness, elevation, and power, if it is to be put into one great word, must be put into this one, 'self-oblivion.'

But whilst all these counterpoises to the love of self are, in their measure and degree, great and noble and blessed, not one of them, nor all of them put together, will so break the fetters from off a prisoned soul and let it out into the large place of utter and glad self-oblivion as the course which our text enjoins upon us when it says: If you wish to forget yourselves, to abandon and lose yourselves, fling yourselves into Christ's arms, and by faith yield your whole being, will, trust, purposes, aims, everything—yield them all to Him; and when you can say, 'We are not our own,' then first will you belong to yourselves and have won your own souls.

There is nothing except that absolute departure from all reliance upon our own poor powers, and from all making of ourselves our centre and aim in life, which gives us true possession of ourselves. Nothing else is comparable to the talismanic power of trust in Jesus Christ. When thus we lose ourselves in Him we find ourselves, and find Him in ourselves.

I believe that, at bottom, a life must either spin round on its own axis, self-centred and self-moved, or else it must be drawn by the mass and weight and mystical

attractiveness of the great central sun, and swept clean out of its own little path to become a satellite round Him. Then only will it move in music and beauty, and flash back the lustre of an unfading light. Self or God, one or other will be the centre of every human life.

It is well to be touched with lofty enthusiasms; it is well to conquer self in the eager pursuit of some great thought or large subject of study; it is well to conquer self in the sweetness of domestic love; but through all these there may run a perverting and polluting reference to myself. Affection may become but a subtle prolongation of myself, and study and thought may likewise be tainted, and even in the enthusiasm for a great cause there may mingle much of self-regard; and on the whole there is nothing that will sweep out, and keep out, the seven devils of selfishness except to yield yourselves to God, drawn by His mercies, and say, 'I am not my own; I am bought with a price.' Then, and only then, will you belong to yourselves.

II. Secondly, if we will take Christ for our Lord we shall be lords of our own souls.

I have said that self-surrender is self-possession. It is equally true that self-control is self-possession; and it is as true about this application of my text as it was about the former, that Christianity only says more emphatically what moralists say, and suggests and supplies a more efficient means of accomplishing the end which they all recognise as good. For everybody knows that the man who is a slave to his own passions, lusts, or desire is not his own master. And everybody knows that the man who is the sport of circumstance, and yields to every temptation that comes sweeping round him, as bamboos bend before every blast; or the man who is guided by fashion, conventionality, custom, and

the influence of the men amongst whom he lives, and whom he calls 'the world,' is not his own master. He 'dare not call his soul his own.'

What do we mean by being self-possessed, except this, that we can so rule our more fluctuating and sensitive parts as that, notwithstanding appeals made to them by external circumstances, they do not necessarily yield to these? He possesses himself who, in the face of antagonism, can do what is right; who, in the face of temptation, will not do what is wrong; who can dare to be in the right with one or two; and who is not moulded by circumstances, howsoever they may influence him, but reacts upon them as a hammer, and is not as an anvil. And this superiority over the parts of my nature which are meant to be kept down, and this assertion of independent power in the face of circumstances, and this freedom from the dominion of cliques and parties and organs of opinion and loud voices round us, this is best secured in its fulness and completeness by the path which my text suggests.

Trust in Jesus Christ, and let Him be your Commander-in-chief, and you have won your souls. Let Him dominate them, and you can dominate them. If you will give your wills into His hands, He will give them back to you and make you able to subdue your passions and desires. Put the reins into Christ's hands and say, 'Here, O Lord, guide Thou the horses and the chariot, for I cannot coerce them, but Thou canst.' Then He will come and bring a new ally in the field, and cast a new weight into the scale, and you will no longer be the slave of the servile and inferior parts of your nature; nor be kicked about, the football of circumstances; nor be the echo of

some other body's views, but you will have a voice of your own, and a will of your own, and a soul of your own, because you have given them to Christ, and He will help you to control them. Such a man—and I verily believe, from the bottom of my heart, such a man only—in the fullest sense, is

> 'Free from slavish bands,
> Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;
> Lord of himself, though not of lands;
> And having nothing, yet hath all.'

What does some little rajah, on the edge of our great Indian Empire, do when troubled with rebels whom he cannot subdue? He goes and makes himself a feudatory of the great central power at Calcutta, and then down comes a regiment or two, and makes very short work of the rebellion that the little kinglet could do nothing with. If you go to Christ and say to Him, 'Dear Lord, I take my crown from my head and lay it at Thy feet. Come Thou to help me to rule this anarchic realm of my own soul,' you will win yourself.

III. Thirdly, if we have faith in Christ we acquire a better self.

The thing that most thoughtful men and women feel, after they have gone a little way into life, is not so much that they want to possess themselves, as that they want to get rid of themselves—of all the failures and shame and disappointment and futility of their lives. That desire may be accomplished. We cannot strip ourselves of ourselves by any effort. The bitter old past keeps living on, and leaves with us seeds of weakness and memories that sometimes corrupt, and always enfeeble: memories that seem to

limit the possibilities of the future in a tragic fashion. Ah, brethren! we can get rid of ourselves; and, instead of continuing the poor, sin-laden, feeble creatures that we are, we can have pouring into our souls the gift most real—though people nowadays, in their shallow religion, call it mystical—of a new impulse and a new life. The old individuality will remain, but new tastes, new aspirations, aversions, hopes, and capacities to realise them may all be ours, so that 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature'; and in barter for the old garment he receives the robe of righteousness. You can lose yourselves, in a very deep and earnest sense, if, trusting in Jesus Christ, you open the door of the heart to the influx of that new life which is His best gift. Faith wins a better self, and we may each experience, in all its fulness and blessedness, the paradox of the apostle when he said, 'I live' now, at last, in triumphant possession of this better life: 'I live' *now*—I only existed before—'yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' And with Christ in me I first find myself.

IV. Lastly, if by faith we win our souls here, we save them from destruction hereafter.

I have said that the word of my text is substantially equivalent to the more frequent and common expression 'salvation'; though with a shade of difference, which I have been trying to bring out. And this substantial equivalence is more obvious if you will note that the text is the second member of an antithesis of which the first is, 'we are not of them which draw back into perdition.'

So, then, the writer sets up, as exact opposites of one another, these two ideas—perdition or destruction on the one hand, and the saving or winning of the soul on

the other. Therefore, whilst we must give due weight to the considerations which I have already been suggesting, we shall not grasp the whole of the writer's meaning unless we admit also the thought of the future. And that the same blending of the two ideas, of possession and salvation in the more usual sense of the word, was implied in the Lord's saying, of which I have suggested there may be an echo here, is plain if you observe that the version in St. Luke gives the text which I have already quoted: 'In your patience ye shall win your souls'; and that of St. Matthew, in the same connection, gives, instead, the saying, 'he that *endureth*'—which corresponds with *patience*—'he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'

So, then, brethren, you cannot be said to have won your souls if you are only keeping them for destruction, and such destruction is clearly laid down here as the fate of those who turn away from Jesus Christ.

Now, it seems to me that no fair interpretation can eject from that word 'perdition,' or 'destruction,' an element of awe and terror. However you may interpret the ruin, it is ruin utter of which it speaks. And I am very much afraid that in this generation eager discussions about the duration of punishment, and the final condition of those who die impenitent, have had a disastrous influence on a great many minds and consciences in reference to this whole subject, by making it rather a subject of controversy than a solemn truth to be pondered. However the controversies be settled, there is terror enough left in that word to make us all bethink ourselves.

I lay it on your hearts, dear friends—it is no business of mine to say much about it, but I lay it on your hearts and on my own; and I beseech you to ponder

it. Do not mix it up with wholly independent questions as to what is to become of people who never heard about Jesus Christ. 'The Judge of all the earth will do right.' What this verse says applies to people that *have* heard about Him—that is, to you and me—and to people that do not accept Him—and that is some of us; and about them it says that they 'draw back unto perdition.'

Now, remember, the alternative applies to each of us. It is a case of 'either—or' in regard to us all. If we have taken Christ for our Saviour, and, as I said, put the reins into His hands and given ourselves to Him by love and submission and confidence, then we own our souls, because we have given them to Him to keep, 'and He is able to keep that which is committed to Him against that day.'

But I am bound to tell you, in the plainest words I can command, that if you have not thus surrendered yourself to Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His intercession, His quickening Spirit, then I know not where you are to find one foothold of hope that upon you there will not come down the overwhelming fate that is darkly portrayed in that one solemn word.

Oh, brethren! let us all ponder the question, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'

SEEKING GOD

'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'—HEB. xi. 6.

THE writer has been pointing to the patriarch Enoch as the second of these examples of the power of faith in the Old Covenant; and it occurs to him that there is nothing said in Genesis about Enoch's faith, so he sets

about showing that he must have had faith, because he 'walked with God,' and pleased Him, and no man could thus walk with God, and please Him, unless he had come to Him, and no man could come to a God in whom he did not believe, and whom he did not believe to be waiting to help and bless him, when he did come. So the facts of Enoch's life show that there must have been in him an underlying faith. That is all that I need to say about the context of the words before us. I am not going to speak of the writer's argument, but only of this one aspect of the divine character which is brought out here. 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'

I. Now a word about the seeking.

'Seek?' Do we need to seek? Not in the way in which people go in quest of a thing that they have lost and do not know where to find. We do not need to search; we do not need to seek. The beginning of all our seeking is that God has sought us in Jesus Christ, and so we have done for ever with: 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him.' We have done for ever with 'feeling after Him, if haply we might find Him.' That is all past. We have to seek, but let us never forget that we must have been found of Him, before we seek Him. That is to say, He must have revealed Himself to us in the fulness and reality and solid certainty of His existence and character, before there can be kindled in any heart or mind the desire to possess Him. He must have flashed His light upon the eye before the eye beholds; and He must have stimulated the desire by the revelation of Himself which comes before all desires, ere any of us will stir ourselves up to lay hold upon God. Ours, then, is not to be a doubtful search, but a certain seeking, that goes

straight to the place where it knows that its treasure is, just as a migratory bird will set out from the foggy and ice-bound shores of the north, and go straight through the mists and the night, over continents and oceans, to a place where it never was before, but to which it is led—God only knows how—by some deep instinct, too deep to be an error, and too persistent not to find its resting-place. That is how we are to seek. We are to seek as the flower turns its opening petals to the sunshine, making no mistake as to the quarter of the heaven in which the radiance is lodged. We have to seek, as the rootlet goes straight to the river, knowing where the water is, from which life and sap will come. Thus we have to seek where and what we know. Our quest is no doubtful and miserable hunting about for a possible good, but an earnest desire for a certain and a solid blessing. That is the seeking.

Let us put it into two or three plain words. The prime requisite of the Christian's seeking after God is as the writer here says, faith. I need not dwell upon that. 'Must believe that He is'—yes; of course. We do not seek after negations or hypotheses; we seek after a living Being. 'And that He is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him'—yes; if we were not sure that we should find what we wanted, we should never go to look for it. But, beyond all that, let me put three things as included in, and necessary to, the Christian seeking—desire, effort, prayer. We seek what we desire. But too many of us do not wish God, and would not know what to do with Him if we had Him, and would be very much embarrassed if it were possible for the full blessings which come along with Him, to be entrusted to our slack hands and unloving hearts. Brethren, we call ourselves Christians; let us

be honest with ourselves, and rigid in the investigation of the thoughts of our own hearts. Is there a wish for God there? Is there an aching void in His absence, or do we shovel cartloads of earthly rubbish into our hearts, and thus dull desires that can be satisfied only with Him? These are not questions to which any one has a right to expect an answer from another; they are not questions that any Christian man can safely shirk answering to himself and to God. The measure of our seeking is actually settled by the measure of our desire.

Then effort, of course, follows desire as surely as the shadow comes after the substance, because the only purpose of our desires, in the constitution of our nature, is to supply the driving power for effort. They are the steam in the boiler intended to whirl round the wheels. And so for a man to desire a thing that he can do nothing whatever to bring about, is misery and folly. But for a man to desire, and not to work towards fulfilling his desire, is greater misery and greater stupidity. One cannot believe in the genuineness of those devout aspirations that one hears in people's prayers, who get up and wipe the dust off their knees, and go out into the world, and do nothing to bring about the fulfilment of their prayers. There is a great deal of that sort of desire amongst professing Christians in all churches, conventional utterances which are backed up and verified by no corresponding conduct. If we are seeking after God, we shall not let all the seeking effervesce in pious aspirations; it will get consolidated into corresponding action, and operate to keep thought and love directed towards Him, even amidst the trivialities, and legitimate duties, and great things of life. There will be effort to bring

Him into connection with all our work; effort to keep by Him as we go about our daily tasks, if we are truly seeking after God.

And then, desire and effort being pre-supposed, there will come honest prayers, genuine prayers. 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,' says the prophet, and immediately goes on to exhort us to 'call upon Him while He is near,' as one and the chief way of seeking Him. He is always near, closer to us than friends and lovers, closer to us than our eyes and hands, near in His Son and the Spirit, near to hear and to bless, near and desiring to be nearer, yea to be blended with our being and to dwell in us and we in Him. We have not only to desire His gift, and to work towards it, but to ask for it. Then, if we exercise these three activities of desire, effort, petition, we may truly say: 'When Thou saidst, "Seek ye My face," my heart said unto Thee, "Thy face, Lord! will I seek,"' and may go on, as the psalmist did, to offer the consequent prayer: 'Hide not Thy face from me,' in full assurance that He is found by every seeking soul. So much for the seeking.

II. Now a word about the diligence in seeking.

The writer uses a very strong expression, one word in the original, which is here adequately rendered, 'them that diligently seek Him.' Half-hearted seeking finds nothing. You sometimes say to your children, when you have set them to look for anything, and they come back and say they have not been able to find it, 'You do not know how to seek.' And that is true about a great many of us. Half and half desire, so that one eye is turned on earth, and the other lifted up now and then to heaven, does not bring us much. It will bring a little, but not the fulness of blessing

which follows on whole-hearted, continuous, persevering seeking. If you hold a cup below a tap, in an unsteady hand, sometimes it is under the whole rush of the water, and sometimes is on one side, and it will be a long time before you get it filled. There will be much of the water spilled. God pours Himself upon us, and we hold our vessels with unsteady hands, and twitch them away sometimes, and the bright blessing falls on the ground and cannot be gathered up, and our cup is empty, and our lips parched. Interrupted seeking will find little; perfunctory seeking will find less. Conventional religion brings very little blessing, very little consciousness of the presence of God; and that is why so many who call themselves Christians, and are so, in a measure and in a sense, know so little of the joy of being found of God. They have sought but not sought diligently.

Now let us take the rebuke to ourselves, if we need it, and we all need it more or less. It is a very threadbare piece of Christian counsel, to be earnest in our seeking after God, but it is none the less needed because it is threadbare, and it would not be threadbare if it had not been so much needed. 'They that search *diligently*'—which is the real meaning of the words in the Book of Proverbs rendered, 'they that seek Me *early*'—'shall find Me.'

III. So this brings me to the last thing here, the Rewarder and the reward.

'He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' The best reward of seeking is to find the thing that you are looking for. So the best reward that God, the Rewarder, gives is when He gives Himself. There are a great many other good things that come to the diligently seeking Christian soul, but the best thing is

that God draws near. Enoch sought God, came to God, and so he walked with God. The reward of his coming was continuous, calm communion, which gave him a companion in solitude, and one to walk at his side all through the darkness and the roughnesses, as well as the joys and the smoothnesses, of daily life.

Ah, brethren! there is no reward comparable to the felt presence in our own quiet hearts of the God who has found us, and whom we have found. And if we have that, then He becomes, here and now, the reward of the diligent search, and the reward of it to-day carries in itself the assurance of the perfect reward of the coming time. 'He walked with God, and . . . God took him.' That will be true of all of us. There is only one seeking in life that is sure to result in the finding of what we seek. All other search—the quest after the chief good—if it runs in any other direction, is resultless and barren. But there is one course, and one only, in which the result is solid and certain. 'I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek ye My face in vain.' If we seek He will be found of us, and so be our Rewarder and our reward.

NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.'—HEB. xi. 7.

THE creed of these Old Testament saints was a very short one, and very different from ours. Their faith was the very same. It is the great object of the writer of this Epistle, in this magnificent catalogue of the heroes of the faith, the muster roll of God's great army,

to establish the principle that from the beginning there has only been one kind of religion, only one way to God; and that, however rudimentary and brief the articles of belief in those early days, the faculty by which these far-away believers lay hold on them, and its practical issues, were identical in them and in us, And that is a principle well worth getting into our minds, that the scope of the creed has nothing to do with the essence of the faith.

So we may look at this instance and discern in it. beneath all superficial differences, the underlying identities, and take this dim, half-intelligible figure of Noah, as he stands almost on the horizon of history, as being an example for us, in very vivid fashion, of the true object of faith, its operation in a two-fold fashion, and its vindication.

I. Look first at Noah's faith in regard to its object.

If we think of the incident brought before us in these words, we shall see how the confidence with which Noah laid hold of a dim future, about which he knew nothing, except because God had spoken to him, was, at bottom, identical with that great attitude of the soul which we call faith, as it is exercised towards Jesus Christ.

No doubt in this Epistle to the Hebrews, the aspect of faith by which it lays hold of the future and the unseen, is the one on which the writer's mind is mainly fixed. But notice, that whilst the near object, so to speak, to which Noah stretched out his hands, and of which he laid hold, was that coming catastrophe, with its certainties of destruction and of deliverance; there was only one reason why he knew anything about that, and there was only one reason why he knew or believed anything about it, and that was

because he believed Him who had told him. So, at bottom, God who had revealed the unseen future to him was the object of his faith. He trusted the Person, therefore he believed in that Person's word, and therefore he had the assured realisation of things not seen as yet; and the future, so dim and uncertain to unaided eyes, became to him as certain as the past, and expectation as reliable as memory. His faith grasped the invisible things to come, only because it grasped the Invisible Person, who was, is, and is to come, and who lifted for him the curtain and showed him the things that should be. So is it with our faith; whether it lays hold upon a past sacrifice on Calvary, or upon a present Christ dwelling in our hearts, or whether it becomes telescopic, and stretches forward into the future, and brings the distant near, all its various aspects are but aspects of one thing, and that is personal trust in the personal Christ who speaks to us. What he says is a matter of secondary importance in this respect. The contents of God's revelation vary; the act by which man accepts them is always the same.

So the great question for us all is—do we trust God? Do we believe Him, and therefore accept His words, not only with the assent of the understanding, which of all idle things is the idlest, but do we believe Him, revealing, commanding, promising, threatening, with the trust and affiance of our whole hearts? Then, and then only, can we look with quiet certainty into the dim future, which else is all full of rolling clouds, that sometimes shape themselves to our imaginations into the likeness of stable things, but alas! change and melt while we gaze. Only then can we front the solemn future, and say: 'I do not expect only, I *know*

what is there.' My brother, if our faith is worth calling faith at all, it rests so absolutely and confidingly upon God, that His bare word becomes to us the infallible source of certitude with regard to all the shifting hours of time, and to the steadfast day of an eternity, whose change is blessed growth to an unreached and undeclining noon.

And what was the future that loomed before this man? The coming of a destruction as certain as God, and the coming of a deliverance as complete as His love could make it. Never mind although Noah's outlook related but to a temporary catastrophe, and ours has reference to an eternal condition of things. That is a difference of no real moment. We have what Noah had, a definite, divine utterance, as the source of all our knowledge of what is coming. Both are alike in having two sides, one dark and menacing with a certain destruction, the other radiant and lustrous with as certain a deliverance. And now the question for each of us is, do I so believe God that that future is to me what it was to this man—far more real than these fleeing illusions that lie nearer me?

When Noah walked the earth and saw his contemporaries busy with buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, how fantastic and unreal their work must have seemed to him, when behind them he saw blazing a vision, which he alone of all that multitude believed. Do not let us fancy that we have faith if these near trifles are to us the great realities, and the distance is dim, and unsubstantial, and doubtful, hidden in mist and forgotten. The years that stretched between the divine utterance and its fulfilment were to this man as nothing, and for him the unseen was the reality, and the seen was the

shadowy and phantasmal. And that is what faith worth calling the name will always do for men. Ask yourselves the question if your dim apprehension of that future, in either of its aspects, is anything so vivid as the certitude which blazed ever before the eye of this man. One of our old English writers says, 'If the felicities of another world were as closely apprehended as the joys of this, it were martyrdom to live.' That may be an exaggeration, but surely, surely there is something wrong in men who call themselves believers in God and His word, to whom the things seen and temporal are all or nearly all important, and the trifles an inch from their eyes are big enough to shut out heaven and all its stars.

II. Still further, notice Noah's faith in its practical effects.

If faith has any reality in us at all, it works. If it has no effect it has no existence. The writer points out two operations of this confidence in God which, through belief in His word, leads to a realisation of a remote and unseen future. The effects are two-fold. First on Noah's disposition, faith produced appropriate emotion, excited by the belief in the coming deluge; he was 'moved with fear.' Then, secondly, through emotion, faith influenced conduct—he 'prepared an ark.' This is the order in which faith ever works.

If real and strong, it will first affect emotion. By 'fear' here we are not merely to understand, though possibly it is not to be excluded, a dread of personal consequences, but much rather the sweet and lofty emotion which is described in another part of this same book by the same word: 'Let us serve Him with reverence and with godly fear.' It is the fear of pious regard, of religious awe, of reverence which has love

blended inseparably with it, and is not merely a tremulous apprehension of some mischief coming to me. Noah had no need for that self-regarding 'fear,' inasmuch as one half of his knowledge of the future was the knowledge of his own absolute safety. But reverence, the dread of going against his Father's will, lowly submission, and all analogous and kindred sentiments, are expressed by the word.

Such holy and blessed emotion, which has no torment, is the sure result of real faith. Unless a man's faith is warm enough to melt his heart, it is worth very little. A faith unaccompanied by emotion is, I was going to say worse, at any rate it is quite as bad, as a faith which is all wasted in emotion. It is not a good thing when all the steam roars out through an escape pipe; it is perhaps a worse thing when there is no steam in the boiler to escape. It is easy for people that have not any religion to scoff at what they suppose to be the fanatical excess of emotion which some forms of religious belief develop. I, for my part, would rather have the extremest emotion than a dead cold orthodoxy, that believes everything and feels nothing. There is some hope in the one; the other is only fit to be buried. Do not be afraid of feeling which is the child of faith. Be very much more afraid of a religion that leaves your heart beating just exactly at the same rate that it did before you took the truth into it. I am very, very sure that there is no road, between a man's faith and his practice, except through his heart, and that, as the Apostle has it in a somewhat different form of speech, meaning, however, the same thing that I am now insisting upon, 'faith worketh by love.' Love is the path through which creed travels outward to conduct.

So we come to the second and more remote effect of faith. Emotion will lead to action. 'Moved with fear he prepared an ark.' If emotion be the child of faith, conduct is the child of emotion. Noah's faith, then, led him to a line of action that separated him from the men around him; and it led him to a protracted labour in preparation for a remote end, for the coming of which he had no guarantee except what he believed to be God's word. Commentators calculate that there were a hundred and twenty years between the time of the divine command and the Flood. Think of how this man, for all that long while, set himself to his task, and how many clever speeches would be made, proving that he was a fool, and how many witty gibes would come showering around his head like hail. But he kept steadily on, on a line of conduct which made him singular, and which had regard only to that result a hundred and twenty years off.

Now, is that what you and I are doing? Does our faith so shape our lives that whatever we are about, there is still regard to that far-off future? If you meet a man in the street, hurrying somewhere to welcome a friend expected to arrive from a far-off land, and you detain him in conversation, as you speak he is impatient, keeps looking over your shoulder down the road to see if there is any sign of his coming. That is how we should be acting here—doing our work and sticking to our tasks, but ever letting expectation and desire carry us onwards to that great future, which has already set out from the throne in Eternity, and is speeding towards us even now. Let that future, dear brethren, stand so clear before each of us, that it shall shape our whole work in the present. We shall mould all our lives with reference to it, if we are wise. For

what we make our present, that will our future be. The smaller ends for which men live, and the nearer futures which they struggle towards, lose no jot of their worth by being regarded as but means to that far greater end. Rather, time is only redeemed from triviality, when it is seen to be the preparation for eternity, and earth is never so fair and good as when we discern and use it as the vestibule of heaven. Never mind being singular. He is the wise man whose vision reaches as far as his existence, and whose earthly life has for the end of its effort, to please Christ and be found in Him.

III. And so, lastly, let me point to Noah's faith, in regard to its vindication.

'He condemned the world.' 'The world' thought him wasting life foolishly. No doubt there were plenty of witty and wise things said about him. 'Prudent, far-sighted, practical men' would say, 'How fanatical! What a misuse of energies and opportunities'; and so forth. And then, one morning, the rain began, and continued, and for forty days it did not stop, and they began to think that perhaps, after all, there was some method in his madness. Noah got into his ark, and still it rained, and I wonder what the wits and 'practical men,' that had treated the whole thing as moonshine and folly, thought about it all then, with the water up to their knees. How their gibes and jests would die in their throats when it reached their lips!

And so, my dear friends, the faith of the poor, ignorant old woman that up in her garret lives to serve Jesus Christ, and to win an eternal crown, will get its vindication some day, and it will be found out then which was the 'practical' man and the wise man, and all the

witty speeches and smart sayings will seem very foolish even to their authors, when the light of that future shines on them. And the old word will come true once more, that the man who lives for the present, and for anything bounded by Time, will have to 'leave it in the midst of his days,' and 'at his latter end shall be a fool,' whilst the 'foolish' man who lived for the future, when the future has come to the present, and the present has dwindled away into the past, and sunk beneath the horizon, shall be proved to be wise, and shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

THE CITY AND THE TENT

'Dwelling in tabernacles . . . for he looked for a city.'—HEB. xi. 9, 10.

THE purpose of the great muster-roll of the ancient heroes of Judaism in this chapter is mainly to establish the fact that there has never been but one way to God. However diverse the degrees of knowledge and the externals, the essence of religion has always been the same. So the writer of this Epistle, to the great astonishment, no doubt, of some of the Hebrews to whom it was addressed, puts out his hand, and claims, as Christians before Christ, all the worthies of whom they were nationally so proud. He is speaking here about the three patriarchs. Whether he conceives them to have all lived on the earth at one time or no, does not trouble us at all. 'By faith,' says he, 'Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,' because, 'he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose

builder'—or rather *Architect*—'and maker'—or rather *Builder*—'is God.'

Now, of course, the writer gives a considerable extension of the meaning to the word 'faith'; and in his use one aspect of it is prominent, though by no means exclusively so—viz., the aspect which looks to the unseen and the future, rather than that which grasps the personal Christ. But this is no essential difference from the ordinary New Testament usage; it is only a variation in point of view, and in the prominence given to an element always present in faith. What he says here, then, is substantially this—that in these patriarchal lives we get a picturesque embodiment of the essential substance of all true Christian living, and that mainly in regard of two points, the great object which should fill mind and heart, and the consequent detachment from transitory things which should be cultivated. 'He looked for a city,' and *so* he was contented to dwell in a movable tent. That is an emblem containing the essence of what our lives ought to be, if we are truly to be Christian. Let us, then, deal with these two inseparable and indispensable characteristics of the life of faith.

I. Faith will behold the Unseen City, and the vision will steadfastly fill mind and heart.

As I have remarked, the conception of faith presented in the Epistle is slightly different from that found in other parts of the New Testament. It is but slightly different, for, whether we say that the object of our faith is the Christ, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' or whether we say that it is the whole realm and order of things beyond the grave and above the skies where He is and which He has made our native

land, makes in reality very little difference. We come at last to the thought of personal reliance on Him by whose word and by whose resurrection and ascension only we apprehend, and by whose grace and power and love only we shall ever possess that unseen futurity. So we may fairly say that whilst, no doubt, it is true that the living Christ Himself—and no heaven apart from Him, nor any future apart from Him, nor any thing of His, apart from Him, though it be a cross, but the living Christ Himself is the true object of faith, yet that conception of its object includes the view of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the 'city which has the foundations,' should, because it is all clustered round Him who is its King, be the object that fills our minds and hearts.

I am not going to discuss the details of what this writer supposes to have been the animating principle and aim of that ancient patriarch's life. It matters nothing at all for the power of his example whether we suppose that Abraham looked forward to the realisation of this unseen ideal city in this life or no, for the effect of it upon him would be exactly the same whichever of the two alternatives may have been the case. It matters nothing as to whether Abraham believed in the realisation in that land over which he wandered, of the perfect order of things, or whether he had caught some glimpse, which is very unlikely, of it as reserved for a future beyond the grave. In either case, he lived for and by an unseen and future condition of things. It is beautiful to notice how the writer here, in his picturesque and simple words, puts many blessed ideas as to that future. We may, perhaps, make these a little more clear, but I am afraid we shall make them much more weak, by taking them out of the metaphorical form.

'*The* City'—then there is only one. 'The *City*'—then the object of our hope, ought to be, and is, if we understand it aright, a perfect society, in which the 'sojourners and pilgrims,' like the patriarch, and his little band of children and attendants, who wandered lonely up and down the world, will all be gathered together at last; and, instead of the solitude of the march, and the undefended weakness of the frail encampment, there will be the conjoined gladness and security of an innumerable multitude. 'The City' is the perfection of society, and all of us who live in the world, alone after all communion, and separated from each other by the awful mystery of personal being, and by many another film beside, may hope to understand, as we never shall do here, what the meaning of the little word 'together' is when we get there. 'He looked for the city.'

'The city which hath the foundations'—then the object of faith is a stable thing, which knows no fluctuations, feels no changes, fears no assault, can never be subjected to violence, nor ever crumple into dust. 'The city which hath the foundations'—here and now we have to build, if we build at all, more or less like the foolish man in the Master's parable, upon sand. It is the condition of our earthly life. We have to accept, and to make the best of it. But, oh! those who have learned most the agony of change and the misery of uncertainty are those who have been best disciplined to grasp at and lay up in their hearts the large consolation and encouragement hived in that designation, 'the city which hath *the* foundations.'

The city, 'whose *Architect*'—for the word rendered 'Builder' should be so translated—'is God.' It is the accomplishment of His plan, which, in modern language, is called the realisation of His ideal. I like the old-

fashioned Biblical language better—'the city whose Architect is God.' He planned, and, of course, there follows upon that 'whose Maker or actual Builder is' —the same as the Planner. Architects put their drawings into the hands of rude workmen, and no completed work of man's hands corresponds to the fair vision that dawned on its designer when it took definite shape in His mind.

That is another of the laws of our earthly life which we have to make the best of—that we design grand buildings when we begin, and, when we have finished our lives, and look back upon what we have built, it is a mean and incomplete structure at the best. But God's working drawings get built; His plans are all wrought out in an adequate material; and everything that was in the divine mind once exists in outward fact in that perfect future.

So, inasmuch as the city is a state of perfect society, of stability, is planned by God, and brought about by Him at last, it is to be possessed by us on condition of fellowship with Him. Does it not seem to you to be infinitely unimportant whether this old patriarch thought that what he was looking for was to be builded upon the hills and plains of Canaan or not? That he had the vision is the thing. Where it was to be accomplished was of small moment. We do not know where the vision is to be accomplished any more than Abraham did. We do not know whether here, on this old earth, renovated by some cosmic change, or whether in some region in space, though beyond the stars, perfected spirits shall dwell, and it does not matter. That we should have the vision is the main thing. The where, the when, the how of its fulfilment are of no manner of practical importance, and people who

busy themselves about such questions, and think that therefore they are cultivating the spirit that my text suggests, make a woful mistake.

But let me press on you, dear brethren, this one simple thought, that the average type of Christian life and experience to-day is wofully lacking in that clear vision of the future. Partly it comes, I suppose, from certain peculiarities in the trend of thought and way of looking at things that are fashionable in this generation. We hear so much about Christianity as a social system, and about what it is going to do in this world, which perhaps it was necessary should be stated very emphatically, in order to counterpoise the too great silence upon such subjects in past times, that preaching about the future life strikes a hearer as unfamiliar, and probably some of my audience have been feeling as if I were carrying them into misty regions far away from, and little related to, the realities of life. But, dear brethren, from my heart I believe that one very operative cause of the undeniable feebleness of Christian life, which is so largely manifested round us—and it is for each of us to say whether we participate in it—is due to this, that, somehow or other, there has come in the mind of great masses of Christian people a fading away of that blessed vision of the city, for which we ought to live. You scarcely hear sermons nowadays about the blessedness of a future life. What you hear about it is, how well for this life it is to be a Christian man.

No doubt godliness 'hath promise of the life that now is,' and that side of the gospel cannot be too emphatically set forth. But it may be disproportionately presented, as I venture to think that, on the whole, it is being presented now. Therefore there is the more need for consciously endeavouring to culti-

vate the habit of looking beyond the mists of the present to the gleaming battlements and spires of the city. Let us polish the glasses of our telescopes, and use them not only for distances on earth's low levels, but to bring the stars nearer. So shall we realise more of the present good and power of faith, when it is allowed its widest and noblest range.

II. Faith consequently leads to willing detachment from the present order of offerings.

'He dwelt in tabernacles,' that is, he lived a nomad life in his tents. He and his son and grandson—three generations of long livers—proved the depth, solidity, and practical power of their faith in the promise of the city by the remarkable persistence of their refusal to be absorbed in the settled population of the land. Recent discoveries have shown us, and discoveries still to be made, I have no doubt, will show still more, what a highly organised and developed civilisation prevailed in Canaan when these wanderers from the East came into it, with their black camels'-hair tents. They were almost as much out of place, and as noticeably unique, by such a life in Canaan then, as gypsies are in England, and the reason why they would not go into Hebron, or any other of the populous cities which were closely studded in the land, was that 'they looked for *the* City.' It was better for them to dwell in tents than in houses.

The clear vision of that great future impresses on us the transiency of the present. We shall know that what we live in is but as a tent that is soon to be struck, even while some of our fellow-lodgers may fancy it to be a house that will last for ever.

The illusion of the permanence of this fleeting show creeps over us all, in spite of our better knowledge, and has to be fought against. The world, though it seems

to be at rest, is going faster than any of the objects in it which are known to be in motion. We are deceived by the universality of the movement of which all things partake, and to us it seems rest. If there comes friction, and now and then a collision, we find out how fast we are going. And then there come misery, and melancholy, and lamentations about the brevity of life, and the awfulness of change, and all these other commonplaces that are the stock-in-trade of poetasters, but which cut with such surprise and agony into our own hearts when we experience them.

But, brethren, to be convinced of the transiency of life, by reason of the clearness of the vision of the permanence of the heavens, is blessedness and not misery, and is the only way by which a man can bear to say to himself, 'My days are as a hand-breadth,' and not fling down his tools and fall into sadness, from feeling that life is as futile as frail. To recognise that nothing continues in one stay, and to see nothing else that is permanent, is the greatest misery that is laid upon man. But to feel, 'Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and Thy kingdom endureth through all generations and I belong to it,' makes us regard with equanimity, and sometimes with solemn satisfaction, the passing away of all the transient, 'that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' 'He looked for a city'; so, 'he dwelt in tents.'

There is another side to that thought. The clear vision of that permanent future will detach us from the perishable present.

Now many difficult questions arise as to how far Christians should hold aloof from the order of things in which they dwell: and to a very large extent the

application of the principle in detail must be left to each man for himself, in the presence of God. But this I am quite sure of, that in this generation the average Christian has a great deal more need to be warned against too great intermingling with than against too great separation from the present world. Abraham sets us an example beautifully comprehensive. He held cordial relations with the people amongst whom he dwelt. He was honoured by them as a prince; he was recognised by them as a servant of God. They knew his bravery. He did not scruple to draw the sword, and to fight in defence, not only of his kinsmen but of his heathen neighbours in Sodom. And yet nothing would induce him to come down from his tent, beneath the terebinth tree of Mamre, in the uplands. Everybody knew that his name was Abraham the Hebrew—the man from the other side. He carried out that name in his life.

Now, I am not going to lay down hard and fast rules —conventional regulations are the ruin of principles. But let us ask ourselves, 'Would anybody call me "the man from the other side," the man who belongs to another set of things altogether than this?' We have to work in the world; to trade in the world; to try to influence the world; to draw many of our enjoyments from it, in common with those who have no other enjoyments than those drawn from it. Of course, there is a great tract of ground common to the men of faith and the men of sense, and I am not urging false aloofness from any occupation, interest, duty, or enjoyment. But what I say is that, if we have the vision of the city clear before us, there will be no need to tell us not to make our home in Hebron or in Sodom.

Lot went down there when he had his choice—and he

got what he wanted, pasturage for his cattle. But he also got what he did not want, destruction, and he lost what he did not care to keep, his share in the city. Abraham stayed on the heights, and up there he kept God, and a good conscience. Probably he did not make so much money as Lot did. Very likely Lot's flocks and herds were larger than his uncle's. But the one man from his height, through the clear air, could see far away the sparkling of the turrets of the city; and the other, down in the hot, steaming plains of Sodom, could see nothing but Sodom and the mountains behind it. Better to live on the heights with Abraham and God than down below with Lot, and wealth, and subterranean brimstone, and naphtha fires ready to burst forth. 'He looked for the city,' 'he dwelt in tents.'

THE ATTACHMENTS AND DETACHMENTS OF FAITH

'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'—HEB. xi. 13 (R.V.).

THE great roll-call of heroes of faith in this grand chapter goes upon the supposition that the living spirit of religion was the same in Old and in New Testament times. In both it was faith which knit men to God. It has often been alleged that that great word *faith* has a different signification in this Epistle from that which it has in the other New Testament writings. The allegation is largely true; in so far as the things believed are concerned they are extremely different; but it is not true in so far as the person trusted, or in so far as the act of trusting are concerned. These

are identical. It was no mere temporal and earthly promise on which the faith of these patriarchs was builded. They looked indeed for the land, but in looking for the land, they looked 'for the city which hath foundations'; and their future hopes had the same dim haze of ignorance, and the same questions unresolved about perspective and relative distances which our future hopes have; and their faith, whatever were its contents, was fundamentally the same out of a soul casting itself upon God, which is the essence of our faith in the Divine Son in whom God is made manifest. So with surface difference there is a deep-lying absolute oneness in the faith of the Old Testament and ours, in essential nature, in the Object which they grasp, and in their practical effects upon life.

Therefore, these words of my text, describing what faith did for the world's grey forefathers, have a more immediate bearing upon us than at first sight may appear, and may suggest for us some thoughts about the proper, practical issues of Christian faith in our daily lives.

I. I take two or three of the points which come most plainly out from the words before us, and ask you to notice, in the first place, how faith fills eye and heart with the future.

You will have observed that I have read my text somewhat differently from the form which it assumes in our Authorised Version. Observe that the words 'And were persuaded of them,' in our Old Version are a gloss,—no part of the original text. Observe, further, that the adverb 'afar off' is intended to apply to both the clauses: 'Having seen them,' and 'embraced them.' And that, consequently, 'embraced' must necessarily be an inadequate representation of

the writer's idea; for you cannot *embrace* a thing that is 'afar off'; and to 'embrace the promises' was the very thing that these men did *not* do. The meaning of the word is here not *embraced*, but *saluted* or *greeted*; and the figure that lies in it is a very beautiful one. As some traveller topping the water-shed may see far off the white porch of his home, and wave a greeting to it, though it be distant, while his heart goes out over all the intervening, weary leagues; or as some homeward-bound crew catch, away yonder on the horizon, the tremulous low line that is home, and welcome it with a shout of joy, though many a billow dash and break between them and it, these men looked across the weary waste, and saw far away; and as they saw their hearts went out towards the things that were promised, because they 'judged Him faithful that had promised.' And that is the attitude and the act which all true faith in God ought to operate in us.

So, then, here are two things to think about for a moment. One, Faith's vision; the other, Faith's greeting.

People say, 'Seeing is believing.' I should be disposed to turn the aphorism right round, and to say, 'Believing is seeing.' For there is a clearer insight, and a more immediate, direct contact with the thing beheld, and a deeper certitude in the vision of faith than in the poor, purblind sight of sense, all full of illusions, and which has no real possession in it of the things which it beholds. The sight that faith gives is solid, substantial, clear, certain. If I might so say, the true exercise of faith is to stereoscope the dim ghost-like realities of the future, and to make them stand out solid in relief there before us. And he who, clasp-

ing the hand, and if I might so say, looking through the eyes, of God, sees the future, in humble acceptance of His great words of promise, in some measure as God sees it—has a source of knowledge, clear, immediate, certain, which sense with its lies and imperfections, is altogether inadequate even to symbolise. The vision of Faith is far deeper, far more real, far more correspondent to the realities, and far more satisfying to the eye that gazes, than is any of the sight of sense. Do not you be deceived or seduced by talk that assumes to be profound and philosophical, into believing that when you venture your all upon God's word, and doing so say, 'I know, and behold mine inheritance,' you are saying more than calm reason and common-sense teaches us. We have the thing, and we see it, if we believe Him that in His word shows it to us.

Well, then, still further, there is suggested that this vision of faith, with all its blessed clearness and certitude and sufficiency, is not a direct perception of the things promised, but only a sight of them in the promise. And does that make it less blessed? Does the astronomer, who sits in his chamber, and when he would most carefully observe the heavens, looks downwards on to the mirror of the reflecting telescope that he uses, feel that he sees the starry lights less clearly and less really than when he gazes up into the abyss itself and sees *them* there? Is not the reflection a better and a more accurate source of knowledge for him than even the direct observation of the sky would be? And so, if we look down into the promise, we shall see, gleaming and glittering there, the starry points which are the true images adapted to our present sense and power of reception of the great

invisible lights above. God be thanked that faith looks to the promises and not to the realities, else it were no more faith, and would lose some of its blessedness.

And then, still further, let me remind you that this vision of faith varies in the measure of our faith. It is not always the same. Refraction brings up sometimes, above the surface of the sea, a spectral likeness of the opposite shore, and men stand now and then upon our southern coasts, and for an hour or two, in some conditions of the atmosphere, they see the low sandhills of the French or the Belgian coast, as if they were at arm's length. So faith, refracting the rays of light that strike from the Throne of God, brings up the image, and when it is strong the image is clear, and when it flags the image 'fades away into the light of common day'; and where there glowed the fair outlines of the far-off land, there is nothing but a weary wash of waters and a solitary stretch of sea.

My brother! do you see to it that this vision of faith is cultivated by you. It is hard to do. The pressure of the present is terribly strong; the chains of sense that hold us are very adamantine and thick; but still it is possible for us to cultivate the faculty of beholding, and to train the eye to look into that telescope that pries into distant worlds, and brings eternal glories near. No pair of eyes can look the one at a thing near, and the other at a thing afar off; at least if they do the man squints. And no soul can look so as to behold the unseen glories if its eye be turned to all these vanities here. Do you choose whether you shall, like John Bunyan's man with the muckrake, have your eyes fixed upon the straws and filth at your feet, or whether you will look upwards and see the

crown that is glittering there just above your head, and ready to drop upon it. 'These all in faith saw the promises.'

Yes! And when they saw them they greeted them. Their hands and their hearts went out, and a glad shout came to their lips as they beheld the fair vision of all the wonder that should be. And so faith has in it, in proportion to its depth and reality, this going out of the soul towards the things discerned. They draw us when we see them.

One of our seventeenth-century prose writers says:— 'Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live.' It is true. If we see, we cannot choose but love. Our vision will break into desire, and to behold is to yearn after. Oh, Christian men and women! do we know anything of that going out of the soul, in a calm transport of deliberate preference to the things that are unseen and eternal. It is a sharp test of the reality of our Christian profession; do not shrink from applying it to yourselves.

II. And now in the next place, we see here how faith produces a sense of detachment from the present.

'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' The writer is, no doubt, referring to the words of Abraham when he stood up before the Hittites, and asked for a bit of ground to lay his Sarah in—'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you'; and also to Jacob's words to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years.' These utterances revealed the spirit in which they looked upon the settled order in the midst of which they dwelt. They felt that they were not of it, bu belonged to another.

Now there are two different kinds of consciousness that we are strangers and sojourners here. There is one that merely comes from the consideration of the natural transiency of all earthly things, and the shortness of human life. There is another that comes from the consciousness that we belong to another kingdom and another order. A 'stranger' is a man who, in a given constitution of things, in some country with a settled government, owes allegiance to another king, and belongs to another polity. A 'pilgrim' or a 'sojourner' is a man who is only in the place where he now is for a little while. So the one of the two words expresses the idea of belonging to another state of things, and the other expresses the idea of transiency in the present condition.

But the true Christian consciousness of being 'a stranger and a sojourner' comes, not from any thought that life is fleeting and ebbing away, but from the better and more blessed operation of the faith which reveals the things promised, and knits me so closely to them that I cannot but feel separated from the things that are round about me. Men who live in mountainous countries, be it Switzerland, or the Highlands, or anywhere else, when they come down into the plains, pine and fade away sometimes, with the intensity of the 'Heimweh,' the homesickness which seizes them. And we, if we are Christians, and belong to the other order of things, shall feel that this is not our native soil, nor here the home in which we would dwell. Abraham could not go to live in Sodom, though Lot went; and he and his son and grandson kept themselves outside of the organisation of the society in the midst of which they dwelt, because they were so sure that they belonged to another. Or, as the context

puts it, they 'dwelt in *tents* because they looked for the *City*.' It is only sad, disheartening, cutting the nerve of much activity, destroying the intensity of much joy, drawing over life the pall of a deep sadness for a man to say, 'Seventy years are a hand-breadth. I am a stranger and a sojourner.' But it is an ally of all noble, intense, happy living that a man should say, 'My home is with God. I am a stranger and a sojourner here.' The one conviction is perfectly consistent with even desperate absorption in present things. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' is quite as legitimate a conclusion from the consciousness of human frailty, as, 'Let us live for heaven, for to-morrow we die.' It all depends upon what is the source and occasion of this consciousness, whether it shall make us bitter, and shall make us cling to the perishable thing all the more because it is going so soon, or whether it shall lift us up above all these transient treasures or sorrows and fill our hearts with the glad conviction, 'I am a citizen of no mean city, and therefore here I am but a stranger.'

My brother! does your faith lessen the bonds that bind you to earth? Does it detach you from the things that are seen and temporal, or is your life ordered upon the same maxims and devoted to the pursuit of the same objects, and gladdened by the same transitory and partial successes, and embittered by the same fleeting and light afflictions which rule and sway the lives that are rooted only in earth as the tempest sways the grass on the sandhills? If so, what business have we to call ourselves Christians? If so, how can we say that we live by faith when we are so blind, and so incapable of seeing afar off, that the smallest trifle beside us blots out from our vision,

as a fourpenny piece held up against your eyeball might do the sun itself in the heavens there. True faith detaches a man from this present. If your faith does not do that, look into it and see where the falsity of it is.

III. And, lastly, my text brings out the thought of how this same faith triumphs in the article of death. 'These all died in faith.'

That is a very grand thought as applied to those old patriarchs, that just because all their lives long God had done nothing for them of what He had promised, therefore they died believing that He was going to do it. All their disappointments fed their faith. Because the words on which they had been leaning all their lives had not come to a fulfilment, therefore they must be true. That is a strange paradox, and yet it is the one which filled these men's hearts with peace, and which made the dying Jacob break in upon his prophetic swan-song, at the close, with the verse which stands in no relation to what goes before it, or what comes after it. 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' 'These all died in faith' just because they had *not* 'received the promises.'

So, dear brethren, for us the end of life may have a faith nurtured by disappointments, made more sure of everything because it has nothing; certain that He calls into existence another world to redress the balance of the old, because here there has been so much of bitterness and weariness and woe. And our end like theirs may be an end beatified by a clear vision of the things that 'no man hath seen, nor can see'; and into the darkness there may come for us, as there came of old to another, an open heaven and a beam of God's glory smiting us on the face and changing it into the face of an angel. And so there may come for us all in

that article and act of death, a tranquil and cheerful abandonment of the life which has been futile and frail, except when thought of as the vestibule of heaven. Some men cling to the vanishing skirts of this earthly life, and say, 'I will not let thee go.' And others are able to say, 'Lord! I have waited for Thy salvation.' 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.'

'These all died in faith'; and the sorrows and disappointments of the past made the very background on which the bow of promise spanned the sky, beneath which they passed into the Promised Land. 'These all died in faith'; with a vision gleaming upon the inward sense which made the solitude of death bliss, and with a calm willingness 'to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.'

Choose whether you will live by sense and die in sorrow, or whether you will live by the faith of the Son of God, and die to enter 'the City which hath foundations,' which He has built for them that love Him, and which even now, 'in seasons of calm weather,' we can see shining on the hill top far away.

SEEKING THE FATHERLAND

'They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.'
HEB. xi. 14.

WHAT things? Evidently those which the writer has just been saying that the patriarchs of old 'said,' as stated in the previous words—'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth.' The writer has in his mind, no doubt, some of the beautiful incidents of the Book of Genesis; especially, I suppose,

that very touching one where Abraham is standing up by the side of his dead, in the presence of the sons of Heth, and begs from them for the first time a little piece of land that he could call his own. He tells them that he is a stranger and a sojourner amongst them, and wants 'the field and the cave that is therein' in which to bury his dead. Or he may be thinking of the no less touching incident, when Jacob, in his extreme old age, tells the King of Egypt that the days of the years of his pilgrimage have been few and evil, not having attained to the years of his father.

The writer points to these declarations, and reads into them what he was entitled to read into them, something more than a mere acceptance of the external facts of the speakers' condition, as wanderers in the midst of a civilisation to which they did not belong. He sees gleaming through the primary force of the words the further hope which the patriarchs cherished, though it was, as it were, latent in the nearer hope of an earthly inheritance—viz., that of the city which hath foundations, and the country which they could call their own.

Although the writer is not adducing these patriarchs as being patterns for us, but is only establishing his great thesis that they lived by faith in a future blessing, as we ought to do, still we may take the words of my text, with a permissible amount of violence, as appropriate to all of us who call ourselves Christians. 'They who say *such* things do hereby declare plainly,' and by their lives should declare more plainly still, 'that they are seeking a country.'

I. Note, then, first of all, the remarkable representation here given of that future for which Christians look, as being their native land.

The word of our text is very inadequately rendered in our Authorised Version as merely 'a country.' Fully and etymologically rendered, it would be 'the fatherland.' Whether we choose to adopt that somewhat un-English expression or no, at all events, the idea conveyed is that these men, having come out from Mesopotamia, and being wanderers, in their goat's-hair tents, in the midst of the fenced cities of Canaan, were thereby seeking for a land which was their native land, their home, the place to which they felt that they belonged far more truly than to the land from which they came out, or to the land in which they were for the moment wandering. That is the idea that I would enforce as needful for all true and noble Christian living, the recognition that our true home, the country and the order with which we are connected by all our deepest and most real affinities, the land where, and where only, we shall feel at rest, and surrounded by familiar things and loved persons, is that land which lies beyond the flood.

We do not belong, and should feel that we do not belong, to the place and order where we happen to stand to-day. This present and the order of things here should be for us either like that Aram Naharaim, 'the Syria between the two rivers,' the dust of which Abraham had shaken from off his feet; or it should be like that rotten though splendid civilisation into the midst of which He came, and of which He sternly refused to enrol Himself as a citizen. Our home is where Jesus Christ is, and there is something profoundly wrong in us unless we feel that that, and not this, is our native soil, and that there, and not here, is the place to which we belong.

Our colonists on the other side of the world, though

they have never seen England, talk about 'going home.' And so we, inhabitants of this outlying colony of the great city, ought to look across the flood, and sometimes catch a sight of those bright realms beyond, and always feel that they are really our native land. 'They that say such things declare plainly' that they are not citizens here, but belong yonder.

II. Then, mark again, the other parallel which may be drawn between these men's attitude and ours, in that their whole career was a seeking the true Fatherland.

Again, our translation is inadequate because it does not give the energetic force of the word that is rendered 'seek.' It was not a seeking, on the part of the patriarchs, in the sense of looking for an unseen thing, or searching about to find an undiscovered one. That was all done for them by God. They had not to seek in that unsatisfactory and disturbing sense, but they *had* to seek, in the sense of projecting their desires onwards to the blessing that God held out in His hand for them, and letting their faith grasp the promise and their thoughts expatiate in the future, which was as sure to them as the present, because God had made it. The word for *seeking* in the original is very emphatic. It implies the going out of longings and yearnings and thoughts to something which *is* there, to be grasped and laid hold of. Thank God we have not to seek our native soil as wanderers who may perchance fail in our quest, and die at last homeless. It is brought to us, and certified to us by the divine veracity, sealed to us by the divine faithfulness, reserved for us by the divine power, made possible for us by the divine forgiving mercy. But still we have to seek, letting our hearts go out towards that good land, letting our thoughts play about it and become

familiar with it, letting our desires tend towards it, and ever, in all the dusty ways of daily life, and amidst all the distractions of monotonous and recurring duties, keeping our heads above the mist and looking into the clear blue, where we may see the vision of the certain future.

The management and discipline of our thoughts is included in that seeking, and I am afraid that that is a part of Christian culture woefully neglected by the average Christian of this day. If we consider the comparative magnitude of the future and the present, and the certain issue of the present in the future, are our thoughts of it such as common-sense would make them? Is that 'land that is very far off' a frequent ordinary subject of contemplation by us, in the midst of the hurry and bustle of our daily life? Or have we let the glasses of the telescope of hope get all dimmed and dirty; and when we do polish them up, do we use them to look at the stars with, or at the earth and its beauties? Whither do my anticipations of the future tend? Is my hope shortsighted or longsighted? Is it only able to see the things on this side the river, or can it catch any of the glories beyond? Our fault is not in not living enough in the future, but in the selection of the future in which we live. 'We are saved by hope,' if we rightly direct the hope. We are ruined by hopes when they are cribbed, cabined, and confined to this miserable present. Brother! do you seek your home by the cultivation of the contemplation of it and the desire for it, and so almost emulate the divine prerogative and call things that are not as though they were?

Oh! how different our lives would be if we walked in the light of that great hope, and how different

everything here would be if we regarded all here as auxiliary and subsidiary to that.

Above all, if it were true of us, as it ought to be in accordance with our profession of being Christians, that we seek a country, should we think about death as we do? Should we drape it in such ugly forms? Should we shrink from it as most of us, I fear, do as a dread and an enemy and a disaster? No doubt there is, and there always will be, a natural shrinking; but the man who can say that to die is to be with Christ, and who sets that thought ever before him, will be helped over the dark gulf; and the shrinking will be turned, if not into desire at least into calm scorn of the last enemy, the encounter with whom does not diminish his longing to be with his Lord.

These are heights of Christian feeling so far above most of us that we are tempted to think them unreal and fantastic; but they are the heights to which we should naturally rise, if once we realised the greatness, the blessedness, the certainty of that hidden hope above. Dear friends, if we look onwards to our own end, are we only or chiefly conscious of a cold thrill of recoil and repulsion? Let us ask ourselves if our feeling corresponds to our profession that Christ is our life, and that where He is is our heaven and our hope.

III. Lastly, notice the unmistakable witness of profession and life which we are to bear.

'They declare plainly.' They make it absolutely and unmistakably manifest, says the writer, that they seek a country. It did not need that Abraham should stand up before the sons of Heth and say, 'I am a pilgrim and a sojourner amongst you.' They all knew it. *There* was his tent outside the city walls, and a strange

life that little tribe of people, he and his followers, lived, wandering up and down the land and refusing to settle themselves anywhere. They lived a life unlike that of the people among whom they dwelt. We know that in these early days there were fenced cities, outside the walls of which they dwelt, and there all the evidences of a highly developed and advanced civilisation existing in the land. These patriarchs lived like gypsies in the country, roaming everywhere but rooted nowhere; and the reason they so lived was that they 'looked for a city which hath foundations.'

'Yes! the man, before the eyes of whose faith there is ever shining that permanent state of blessed union with Jesus Christ and of sweet society with all the good, can afford to recognise the things that are seen as transient, as they must be. He will be in no danger of mistaking the fleeting shows for eternal realities. If we are looking for the city we shall dwell in tabernacles; and the more our faith grasps the permanent realities beyond, the more will our experience realise the transitoriness of the things here by our sides.

The very fact that men call themselves Christians is a declaration that they are seeking for a city. Do you act up to your declaration? Is your Christianity a matter of lip or of life? Have you pitched your tents outside the city to confirm your declaration that you do not belong to this community? And do you live as in it, but not of it?

Our outward lives ought to make most distinctly manifest that we are citizens of the heavens, and that will be made manifest by abstinence from a great deal. There are many things, right enough in themselves, which are not expedient, and therefore not right, for a

Christian man to do, if they fasten him down to this present. And you will have to cut yourselves loose from a good deal to which otherwise it would be permissible for you to be attached, if you intend to rise towards God; and whatever we do like other people, we shall have to do from a manifestly different temper or spirit. Two men may engage in precisely the same occupation. For instance, there may be two tellers at one side of a bank counter, or two depositors on the other, doing exactly the same things, and yet one of them may do them so as to 'declare plainly,' even in that act, 'that he is seeking a country,' and that he is not wholly swallowed up in the love and high estimate of worldly wealth. The motive from which, the end towards which, the help by which, the accompanying thoughts with which, we do our daily, secular work, may hallow it, and make it express our heavenly-mindedness, as completely as if we went apart on the mountain, and held communion in prayer and praise with God.

We do not want 'plain' declarations by so-called religious acts, still less by religious professions, half as much as we do plain declarations by an obviously Christian way of doing secular things, and living the daily life of men upon earth. Remember the illustration from the conduct of the very men of whom my text speaks. I said that they kept themselves aloof from the civilisation around them. That requires modification to be a full statement of the case. They threw themselves into it, when necessary, with all energy. Lot went down to Sodom because it offered good grazing land. He behaved just as many professing Christians handle the world, going down amongst the slime-pits and the scoundrels for the sake of

making a little money out of them—whilst Abraham stopped on the more barren pastures of the hills, with freedom, security, and holiness. When Lot got what he deserved, and was involved in the disaster of the city that he had made his home, Abraham did not say, 'It is a very sad thing, but Lot must get himself out of the difficulty.' He buckled on his sword and armed his followers, turning himself into a soldier for the time being, and promptly gave chase to the robbers, following them all through the night, along the whole length of the Holy Land, and pounced upon them, routing them, as they lay in fancied security, and liberating their prisoner, who was the captive of his own lust and covetousness much more sadly than of the Eastern marauders.

And so, the detachment from the present, which is needful for Christian men, is to be combined with the most energetic discharge of the duties which we owe to ourselves and to those around us, and especially to be combined with the most diligent work for those who have fallen captive to the snares of the world which we, by His mercy, have been able to escape. And he will best manifest, and most plainly declare, that he seeks a country who seeks most earnestly to hallow all ordinary life, and to do the work, here and now, which God prescribes for him. There is an old story about a question being put to some good man who was fond of playing chess. 'What would you do if, when you were at the chess-board, you were told that Jesus Christ was coming?' 'Finish the game' was the wise answer. There is another story about a scene in the American House of Representatives in its early time. A great darkness came on during the sitting, and some timid souls began to think that the last day

was at hand. The President said, 'Bring candles and let us go on with the debate.' If the Master is coming, we are best found doing our work. Yes! Best doing our work, if it is His work. And all our work may be His if it is done for His sake and in His strength.

Christian men and women! see to it that there be no ambiguity about your position, no mistaking your nationality, and that in your life, without ostentation, without offensively forcing your religion upon peoples' notice, you declare plainly that you, at any rate, seek your native home.

THE FUTURE WHICH VINDICATES GOD

'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city.'—HEB. xi. 16.

THESE are bold words. They tell us that unless God has provided a future condition of social blessedness for those whom He calls His, their life's experience on earth is a blot on His character and administration. He needs heaven for His vindication. The preparation of the City is the reason why He is not 'ashamed to be called their God.' If there were not such a preparation, He had need to be ashamed. Then my text, further, by its first word 'wherefore,' carries our thoughts back to what has been said beforehand; and that is, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.' Therefore God 'is not ashamed of them,' as the Revised Version has it, with a fuller rendering, 'to be called their God.' That is to say, the attitude of the men who look ever forward, through the temporal, to the things unseen and eternal, is worthy of their relation with Him, and it alone is worthy. And if people professing to be His, and professing that He is theirs, do not so live, they

would be a disgrace to God, and He would be ashamed to own them for His.

So there are two lines of thought suggested by our text; two sets of obligations which are deduced by the writer of this Epistle from that solemn name—'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' The one set of obligations refers to Him; the other to us. There are, then, three things here for our consideration—the name; what it pledges God to do; and what it binds men to seek. Let me ask you to look at these three things with me.

I. First of all, then, regard the significance of the name round which the whole argument of our verse turns.

The writer lays hold of that wonderful designation, by which the God of the whole earth knit Himself, in special relationship of unity and mutual possession, to these three poor men—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he would have us ponder that name, as meaning a great deal more than the fact that these three were His worshippers, and that He was their God, in th sense in which Moloch was the God of the Phœnician ; Jupiter, the god of the Romans; or Zeus of the Greeks. There is a far deeper and sacreder relation involved than that. 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob' means not only that His name was in some measure known as a designation, and in some measure honoured by external worship, by the patriarchs, but it involved much in regard to Him, and much in regard to them. It is the name which He took for Himself, not which men gave to Him, and, therefore, it expresses what He had made Himself to these men. That is to say, the name implies a direct act of self-revelation on the part of God. It implies condescending approach and nearness of communion. It implies possession,

mutual and reciprocal, as all possession of spirit by spirit must be. It implies still more wonderfully and profoundly that, just as in regard to the relations between ourselves, so, in regard to the loftiest of all relations, God owns men, and men possess God, because, on both sides of the relationship, there is the same love. Other forms of connection between men and God differ from this deepest of all in that the attitude on the one side corresponds to, but is different from, the attitude on the other. If we think of God as the object of trust, on His side there is faithfulness, on our side there is faith. If we think of Him as the object of adoration, on His side there is loftiness, on our side there is lowliness. If we think of Him as the Supreme Governor, His commandment is answered by our obedience. But if we think of Him as ours, and of ourselves as His, the bond is identical on either part. And though there be all the difference that there is between a drop of dew and the boundless ocean, between the little love that refreshes and bedews my heart, and the great abyss of the same that lies, not stagnant though calm, in His, yet my love is like God's, and God's love is like mine. And that is the deepest meaning of the name, 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob':—mutual possession based upon common and identical love.

And then, of course, in so far as we are concerned, the name carries with it the most blessed depths of the devout life, in all its sacredness of intimacy, in all its sweetness of communion, in all its perfectness of dependence, in all its victory over self, in all its triumphant appropriation, as its very own, of the common and universal good. It is much to be able to say 'Our God, our help in ages past.' It is more to be able to say 'My Lord and my God.' And that appropriation deprives

no other of his possession of God. I do not rob you of one beam of the sunshine when it irradiates my vision. We take in of the common land that which belongs to us, and no other man is the poorer or has the less for his. My God is thy God; and when we each realise our individual and personal relation to Him, as expressed by these two little words, then we are able to say, in close union, 'Our God, the God and Father of us all.' So much, then, for the name.

II. Now a word or two, in the second place, as to what that name pledges God to do.

He is 'not ashamed' of it, 'for He hath prepared for them a city.' Now I do not need to enter at all upon the question as to whether the three patriarchs to whom my text has original reference had any notion of a future life. It matters nothing where or how they thought that that coming blessing towards which they were ever looking was to be realised. The point of the text is that, in any case, they were servants of a future promised to them by God, as they believed, and that that future shaped their whole life.

Think of what their life was. How all their days, from the moment when Abraham left his home, to the moment when the dying Jacob said, with a passion of unfilled expectancy, which yet had in it no hesitancy or doubt or rebuke, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,' that future shaped their whole career! And then, if the end of all was that they lay down in the dust and died, having been lured on from step to step by dazzling illusions dangled before them, which were nothing but dreams, what about the God who did it? and what about their relation to Him! Would there be anything in such a God deserving to be worshipped? Might He not be ashamed of 'being called their God' if

that was all that they got thereby? God needs the City for His own vindication.

Now that seems to be a daring way of putting it, but it is only another form of expressing a very plain thought, that the facts of the religious life here on earth are such as necessarily do involve a future of blessedness, and a heaven.

I need not, I suppose, dwell for more than just in a sentence upon the first plain way in which this truth may be illustrated—namely, that nothing but a future life of blessedness, such as we usually connote by the simple name 'heaven,' saves God's veracity and the truthfulness of His promises. If we believe that the awful silence of the universe has ever been broken by a divine voice; if we believe that God has said anything to men—apart, I mean, from the revelation of Himself made by our nature and in our daily experience—we must believe that He has promised a life to come. And unless such a life do await those who, humbly and with many faults and imperfections, have yet clung to Him as theirs, and yielded themselves to Him as His possession, then

> 'The pillared firmament is rottenness,
> And earth's base built on stubble.'

Let God be true and every man a lie. Unless there is a heaven, He has flashed before us an illusion like that which has tempted many a wanderer into the bog to perish. He has fooled us with a *mirage*, which at the distance looked like palm-trees and cool, flashing lakes, and when we reach it is only burning sand, strewn with bleached bones of the generations that have been cheated before us. 'God is not ashamed . . . for He hath prepared a city.'

But, then, there is another thought, closely connected with the preceding, and yet capable of being dealt with separately, and that is that there is a blot ineffaceable on the divine character unless the desires which He Himself has implanted have a reality corresponding to them. That is true, of course, in the most absolute sense, in regard to all the physical necessities and yearnings which the animal nature possesses. In all that region God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them; and need is the precursor and the prophecy of supply. So it is in regard to the whole creation; so it is in regard to that in us which we share in common with them. Care never irks the full-fed beast. No ungratified desires torture the frame of the short-lived creatures. 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of air have their roosting-places'; and all beings dwell in an environment absolutely corresponding to their capacities, and fitted to satisfy their necessities. But amongst them stalks the exile of creation, man; blessed, though he sometimes thinks he is cursed, with longings which the world has nothing to satisfy; and with ideals which are never capable of realisation amidst the imperfections and fleetingnesses of time. And is that to be all? If so, then God is a tyrant and not a god, and there is little to love in such a character, and He might be ashamed, if He is not, to have made men like that, so ill-fitted for their abode, and to have bestowed upon them the possibility of imagining that to which realisation shall be for ever denied.

And if that is true in regard of many of the desires of life, apart altogether from religion, it becomes still more manifestly and eminently true in regard of Christian experience and devout emotions. For if there is any one thing which an acceptance of Christianity

in the heart and life is sure to do, it is to kindle and make dominant longings, yearnings rising sometimes to pain, which the world is utterly unable to satisfy. Is it ever to be so? Then, oh then, better for us that we should never have known that name; better for us that we had nourished a blind life within our brains; better for us that we had never been born. But 'He hath prepared for them a city,' where wishes shall be embodied, and the ideal shall be reality, and desires shall be fulfilled, and everything that has dwelt, silently and secretly, in the chambers of the imagination shall come forth into the sunlight. Morning dreams are proverbially true. 'We are not of the night, nor of the darkness: we are the children of the day,' and our dreams are one day to pass into the sober certainty of waking bliss.

Then there is another thought still, and that is that it would be a blot ineffaceable on the divine character if all the discipline of life were to have no field in the future on which its results could be manifested. These three poor men were schooled by many sorrows. What were they all for? For the City. And in like manner the facts of our earthly life and our Christian experiences are equally inexplicable and confounding unless beyond these dim and trifling things of time there lie the sunlit and solemn fields of eternity, in which whatsoever of force, valour, worthiness, manhood, we have made our own here shall expatiate for ever more.

I do not mean that life is so sad and weary that we need to call another world into existence to redress the balance of the old. I think that is only very partially true, for we are always apt in such considerations to minimise the pleasures on the whole, and to exaggerate the pains on the whole, of the earthly life. But I mean

that the one true view of all that befalls us here on earth is discipline; and that discipline implies an end for which it is applied, and a realm in which its results are to be manifested. And if God carefully trains us, passes us through varieties of condition, in order to evolve in us a character conformed to His will; puts us to the long threescore years and ten of the apprenticeship, and then has no workshop in which to occupy us afterwards, we are reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment, and life is an inextricable tangle and puzzle.

You may go into certain prehistoric depôts, where you will find lying by thousands flint weapons which have been carefully chipped and shaped and polished, and then, apparently, left in a heap, and never anything done with them. Is the world a great cemetery of weapons prepared and then tossed aside like that? We need a heaven where the faithfulness of the servant shall be exchanged for the joy of the Lord, and he that was faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things.

III. And now a word about my last thought; and that is, what this name binds Christian people to seek.

My text in its former part says, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.' If Abraham, instead of stopping under the oak tree at Mamre, had gone down into Sodom with Lot, and taken up his quarters there; or if he had become a naturalised citizen of Hebron, and struck up alliances with the children of Heth, would the Sodomites or the Hebronites or the Hittites have thought any the better of him therefor? As long as he kept apart from them, he witnessed to the promise, and God looked upon him and blessed

him. But if, professing to look for 'the city which hath the foundations,' he had not been content to dwell in tabernacles, God would have been ashamed of him to be called his God.

Translate that into plain English, and it is this. As long as Christian people live like pilgrims and strangers, they are worthy of being called God's, and God is glad to be called theirs. And as long as they do so, the world will know a religious man when it sees him, and, though it may not like him, it will at least respect him. But a secularised Church or individuals who say that they are Christians, and who have precisely the same estimates of good and evil as the world has, and live by the same maxims, and pursue the same aims, and never lift their eyes to look at the City beyond the river, these are a disgrace to God and to themselves, and to the religion which they say they profess.

I cannot but feel—and feel, I think, in growing degree—that one main clause of the woful feebleness of our average Christianity is that our hopes and visions of the City which hath the foundations have become dim, and that, to a very large extent, the thoughts of 'the rest that remaineth for the people of God' is dormant in the minds of the mass of professing Christian people.

Oh, dear friends! if we will yield to that sweet, strong appeal that is made to us in the name, and, feeling that God is ours and we are His, will turn our hearts and thoughts more than, alas! we have done, to that blessed hope, Jesus will not be ashamed to call us brethren, nor God be ashamed to be called our God. Let us beware that we are not ashamed to be called His, nor to 'declare plainly that we seek a country.'

THE FAITH OF MOSES

'By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.'—HEB. xi. 24-27.

I HAVE ventured to take these verses as a text, not with the idea of expounding their details, or even of touching many of the large questions which they raise, but for the sake of catching their general drift. They are the writer's description of two significant instances in the life of the great Lawgiver of the power of faith. He deals with both in the same fashion. He first tells the act, then he analyses its spring in the state of feeling which produced it, and then he traces that state of feeling to certain external facts which were obvious to the faith of Moses. 'The Great Refusal,' by which he flung up his position at the court of Pharaoh, and chose to identify himself with his people, is the one. His flight from Egypt to the solitudes of Horeb is the other. The two acts are traced to the states of feeling or opinion in Moses. The former came from a choice and an estimate. 'He chose to suffer with the people of God'; and he 'esteemed the reproach . . . greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.' The latter in like manner came from a state of feeling. He 'forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.' What underlay the choice, the estimate, the courage? 'He had respect,' or more literally and forcibly, 'he looked away to the recompense of the reward.' He saw 'Him who is invisible.' So, an act of vision which disclosed him a future recompense and a present God was the

basis of all. And from that act of vision there came states of mind which made it easy and natural to choose a lot of suffering and humiliation, and to turn away from all the glories and treasures and wrath of Egypt.

That is to say, we have here two things—what this man saw, and what the vision did for his life, and I wish to consider these two. The same sight is possible for us; and, if we have it, the same conduct will certainly follow.

I. Note then, first, what this man saw.

Two things, says the writer. 'He looked away to the recompense of the reward,' and he saw God. Now I need not remind you, I suppose, that these two objects of real vision correspond to the two elements of faith which the writer describes in the first verse of our chapter, where he says that it is 'the substance of things hoped for'; to which corresponds 'the recompense of the reward,' and 'the evidence of things not seen,' to which answers 'Him who is invisible.'

Now, that conception of faith, as having mainly to do with the future and the unseen, is somewhat different superficially from the ordinary notion of faith, set forth in the New Testament, as being trust in Jesus Christ. But the difference is only superficial, and arises mainly from a variety in the prominence given to the elements which both conceptions have in common. For the faith which is trust in Jesus Christ *is* directed towards the unseen, and includes in itself the realisation of the future. And the faith which is vivid consciousness of the invisible world, and realisation of a coming retribution, finds them both most clearly and most surely in that Lord 'in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' and anticipate

the future 'end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.'

So we may take these two points that emerge from our text, and look at them as containing for our present purpose a sufficient description of what our faith ought to do for us.

There must be, first, then, a vivid and resolute realisation of future retribution. Now, note that this same expression, a somewhat peculiar one, 'the recompense of the reward,' is found again in this letter in directly the opposite reference from that which it has here. In the second chapter of the Epistle we read that 'every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward.' Both recompense by punishment and by blessedness are included in the word, so that its meaning is the exact requital of good or evil by a sovereign judge.

And that is the very purpose which faith has for one of its chief functions, to burn in the conviction on our slothful minds—that all that is round about us is at once cause and consequence; that life is a network of issues of past actions, and of progenitors of future ones; that nothing that a man does ever dies; that

> 'Through his soul the echoes roll,
> And grow for ever and for ever'

that 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' Character is the result of actions. Condition is largely, if not altogether, dependent upon conduct and upon character. And, just as the sandstone cliffs were laid down grain by grain by an evaporated ocean, and stand eternal when the waters have all vanished, so whatever else you and I are making of, and in, our lives, we are making permanent cliffs of character

which will remain when all the waves of time have foamed themselves away.

That process, which is going on moment by moment all through our lives, Christian faith follows beyond the grave. It works right up to the edge of the grave as everybody can see, and many a man's last harvest of the seed that he sowed to the flesh is his, when laid a corrupted corpse into his coffin. But does it stop there? The world may say, 'We know not.' Christian faith overleaps the gulf and sees the process going on more intensely and unhindered in the life yonder. We are like signalmen in their isolated boxes. They pull a lever, and the points a quarter of a mile away are shifted. The man does not *see* what he has done, but he has done it all the same. And when his time for travelling comes, he will find that he has determined the course on which he must run by the actions that were done here.

And so, brethren, this conviction, not merely as being a selfish looking for a peaceful and blessed heaven, as some people try to vulgarise the conception, but as being the thrilling consciousness that every deed has its issues, and is to be done, or refrained from, in view of these, this is what is meant by the word of my text: 'he looked away' to the recompense of reward.

Now remember that such a vision clear and definite before a man, substantial and solid and continuous enough to become a formative power in his life, and even to determine its main direction, is only realisable as the result of very special and continuous effort. The writer of the letter employs a singular and a strong word, which I have tried to *English* by the phrase 'looking off unto the recompense.' He turned away by a determined effort of resolution, averting his gaze

from other things in order to fix it on the far off thing. One use of the tube of the telescope is to shut out cross lights, and concentrate the vision on the far off object, looked at undisturbed. Unless we can thus shut off on either side these dazzling and bewildering brilliances that dance and flicker round us, we shall never see clearly that solemn future and all its infinite possibilities of sorrow or of blessedness. The eye that is focused to look at the things on the earth cannot see the stars. When the look-out man at the bow wants to make sure whether that white flash on the horizon is a sun-smitten sail or a breaker, he knits his brows and shades his eyes with his hand, and concentrates his steady gaze till he *sees*. And you and I have to do that, or the most real things in the universe, away yonder in the extreme distance, will be problematical and questionable to us. Oh, brother! our Christian lives would be altogether different if we made the resolve and kept it, to fix our gaze on 'the recompense of the reward.'

Then the next thing that this man saw, says my text, was 'Him who is invisible.'

Now I do not suppose that there is any reference there to the miraculous manifestations of a divine presence which were given to the lawgiver, for these came long after the incidents which are being dealt with in my text. True! he saw God face to face amidst the solitudes and the sanctities of Sinai. But that is not at all what the writer is thinking about here. He is thinking about the vision which was given to Moses, in no other fashion than it may be given to us, if we will have it, the sight of God to the 'inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude,' and ministers strength to our lives, in solitude or in society. The conscious realisa-

tion of God's presence in our minds and hearts and wills, and the whole trembling and yet rejoicing inner man, aware that God is near, are what is meant by this vision of Him. The realisation of His presence continually, the sight of Him in nature, so that every bush burns with a visible deity, and every cloud is the pillar in which He moves for guidance, the realisation of His presence, in history, in society, operating all changes and working round us, and in us, and on us—this is the highest result of a true religious faith.

And it is worthy to be called *sight*. For not the vision of the eye is the source of the truest certitude, but the vision of the inward spirit. A man may be surer of God than he is of the material universe that he touches and handles and beholds. The vision that a trustful heart has of God is as real, as direct, and, I venture to say, more assured, than the knowledge which is brought to us through sense.

And such a vision ought to be, and will be if we are right, no disturbing or unwelcome thought, but a delight and a strength. A prisoner in a solitary cell sometimes goes mad because he knows that somewhere in its walls there is a peep-hole at which, at any moment, the eye of a gaoler may be on the watch. But the loving heart that yearns after God has nothing but joy in the otherwise awful thought, 'If I take the wings of the morning, Thou art there. If I fly to the uttermost parts of the west, there I meet Thee.' 'If I make my bed in the grave, Thou art there. Thou hast beset me behind and before.' Brethren, either our ghastliest doubt or our deepest joy is, 'Thou, God, seest me.' 'When I awake I am still with Thee.'

II. And now, secondly, notice what the vision did for this man.

I cannot do more than touch very lightly upon the various points that are involved here. But I would have you notice in general that the writer masses the enemies of a noble life, which Moses overcame by this sight, in three general classes — pleasures, treasures, dangers. The faith of Moses lifted him above ignoble pleasures, saved him from coveting fleeting possessions, armed him against mere corporeal perils. And these three—delights, rules, dangers, may be roughly said to be the triple-headed Cerberus that bars our way. Let us look how the vision will help to overcome them all.

This sight will take the brightness out of ignoble and fleeting pleasures. Moses had the ball at his foot, Jewish legends tell us that the very crown was intended to be placed on his head. However that may be, a life of luxurious ease, of command over men, accompanied by the half deification which in old days hedged a king, were his for the taking; and he turned from them all. He did not choose suffering: but he chose to be identified with the people of God, though he knew that thereby he was electing a life of sorrow and of pain. The world has seen no nobler act than that when he passed through the gates of Pharaoh's palace, the fragments of whose glorious architecture we still wonder at, and housed himself in the dark reed huts where the slaves dwelt.

Now that same spirit, both in regard to choice and to estimate, must be ours, and will be ours, if we have any depth and reality of vision of the recompense and of the invisible God. For if you once let the light of these two solemn thoughts in upon the delights of earth, how poor and paltry, how coarse and ignoble, they look! Did you ever see the scenes of a theatre by daylight? What daubs; what rents; what coarse

work! Let the light of the 'recompense' and of God in upon earthly delights, and how they shrivel, and dwindle, and disappear! Ah, brethren! if we would only bring our earthly desires to the touchstone of these two great thoughts, we should find that many a thing that holds us would slacken its grasp, and the fair forms, with their tiny harps, and their sweet songs that tempt us on the flowery island, would be seen for what they are—ravenous monsters whose guests are in the depths of hell. 'He had respect to the recompense of the reward,' and spurned ignoble pleasures. If you see the things that are, you will not be tempted with the things that seem.

And then, further, such a vision will help us to appraise at their true value earthly possessions. I cannot enter upon the question of what the writer means precisely by that singular phrase, attributing to Moses 'the reproach of Christ.' Whether it implies the reproach borne for Christ, or like Christ, or by Christ, all which interpretations are possible, and have been suggested, need not concern us now. The point is that the twofold vision of which the writer is speaking, let in upon worldly possessions, reveals their emptiness and drossiness, as compared with the true riches.

There are old stories of men who in the night received from fairy hands gifts of gold in some cave, and when the daylight came upon them what had seemed to be gold and jewels was a bundle of withered leaves and red berries, already half corrupted and altogether worthless. There are many things that the world counts very precious which are like the fairy's gold. Nothing that can be taken from a man really belongs to him. The only real riches, correspondent with his

necessities, are those which, once possessed, are inseparable from his being, the riches of an indwelling God, and of a nature conformed to His.

And that effect of the vision of the unseen and the future, as bringing down to their true value all the wealth of Egypt and of the world, is a lesson which no man needs more than do we whose lives, and habits of thinking, are passed and formed in a commercial community, in which success means a fortune, and failure means poverty; in which the poor are tempted to look upon the possession of wealth as the only thing to be coveted, and the rich are tempted to look upon it as the one thing to be rejoiced over. Let the light of the future, and of God, ever shine upon your estimates of the worth of the world's wealth.

Lastly, such a vision will arm a man against all perils. I take it that 'forsaking Egypt' in my text refers to Moses' flight to Horeb. Now, in the book of Exodus that flight is traced to his fear. In my text it is traced to his courage. So, then, there may dwell in one heart fearing and not fearing. There may be dread, as there was with Moses, sufficient to impel him to flight, though not sufficient to induce him to abandon the purpose which made flight necessary. He was afraid enough to shelter himself. He was not afraid enough, by reason of dangers and difficulties, to fling up his mission.

That is to say, the vision will not take away from a man natural tremors, nor will it blind him to real dangers and difficulties, but it will steady his resolve, and make him determined, though he may have to bow before the blast, to yield no jot of his convictions, nor fling away any of his confidence. He will flee to Horeb, if need be, but he will not cease to labour for

the redemption of Israel. If we put our trust in God, and live in the continual realisation of future retribution, then, whilst we may prudently adapt our course so as to find a smooth bit of road to walk on, and to avoid dangers which may threaten, we shall never let these either shake our confidence in God, or alter our conviction of what He requires from us.

So I gather up all that I have been trying to say in the one word—the true way to make life noble is the old way, the way of faith. The sight of God, the vision of judgment will make earth's pleasures paltry, earth's treasures dross, earth's dangers contemptible. The way to secure that ennobling and strengthening vision to attend us everywhere, is to keep near to Jesus Christ, and to fix our hearts on Him. In communion with Him pleasures that perish will woo in vain, and possessions from which we must part will lose their worth, and perils that touch the body will cease to terrify; and through faith 'we shall be more than conquerors in Him that loved us.'

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES AND THEIR LEADER

'Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith.'—HEB. xii. 1, 2.

WHAT an awful sight the rows above rows of spectators must have been to the wrestler who looked up at them from the arena, and saw a mist of white faces and pitiless eyes all directed on himself! How many a poor gladiator turned in his despair from them to the place

where purple curtains and flashing axes proclaimed the presence of the emperor, on whose word hung his life, whose will could crown him with a rich reward!

That is the picture which this text brings before our eyes, as the likeness of the Christian life. We are in the arena; the race has to be run, the battle to be fought. All round and high above us, a mist, as it were, of fixed gazers beholds us, and on the throne is the Lord of life, the judge of the strife, whose smile is better than all crowns, whose downward-pointing finger seals our fate. We are compassed with a cloud of witnesses, and we may see Jesus the author and finisher of faith. Both of these facts are alleged here as encouragements to persevering, brave struggle in the Christian life. Hence we have here mainly two subjects for consideration, namely the relation between the saints who are gone and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it; and the contrasted relation between Jesus and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it.

I. The metaphor of the '*cloud* of witnesses' is perhaps intended to express multitude, and also elevation. It may have been naturally suggested by the thought of the saints of the Old Testament (of whom the previous chapter has been so nobly speaking) as exalted to heaven, and hovering far above and far away like the pure whitenesses that tower there. Raphael's great Sistine Madonna has for background just such a light mist of angel faces and adoring eyes all turned to the gentle majesty of the Virgin. There may also be blending in the writer's mind such a reference to the amphitheatre as we have already noticed, which certainly exists in the later portion of the

context. But we must remember that tempting as it is to a hasty reader to deduce from the words the idea that the saints whose 'warfare is accomplished' look down on our struggles here, there is, at all events, no support to that idea in the word 'witnesses.' It is not used, as often in our speech, as equivalent to spectators,' but means here exactly what it does in the previous chapter, namely, attestors or testifiers. They are not witnesses of us, but to us, as we shall see presently. It may, indeed, be that the thought of the heavenly spectators of our Christian course is implied in the whole strain of the passage, and of the imagery borrowed from the arena, which would certainly be incomplete if there were nothing to answer to the spectators, who, whether at Corinth or Rome, made so important a part in the scene.

We shall be going too far, I think, if we dogmatically assert, on the strength of a figure, that this context teaches a positive communion between earth and heaven of such a sort as that they who have 'overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony,' know about the struggles of us down here in the arena. Still, one feels that such an idea is almost needed to give full force either to the figure or exhortation. It does seem somewhat lame to say, You are like racers, surrounded with a crowd of witnesses, therefore run, only do not suppose that they really see you. If this be so, the glowing imagery certainly seems to receive a violent chill, and the flow of the exhortation to be much choked. Still we can go no further than a modest 'perhaps.'

But even as a 'may be,' the thought of such a knowledge stimulates. As all the thousand eyes of assembled Greece looked on at the runners, and all the

dialects of its states swelled the tumult of acclaim which surged round the victor, so here the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, the festal gathering on Mount Zion, into relations with which this very chapter says we have come, may be conceived of as sitting, solemn and still, on the thrones around the central throne, and bending not unloving looks of earnest pity on the arena below where they too once toiled and suffered.

It may be that, before their eyes, who have been made wise by death, and who, standing within the 'sanctuary of God, understand the end' of life and life's sorrows, are manifest our struggles, as with weary feet and drooping limbs we blunder on in the race. Surely there is love in heaven, and it may be there is knowledge, and it may be there is care for us. It may be that, standing on the serene shore beside the Lord, who has already prepared a meal for us with His own hands, they discern, tossing on the darkened sea, the poor little boats of us downhearted, unsuccessful toilers, who cannot yet descry the Lord, or the welcome which waits on the beach.

At all events the thought may come with cheer to our hearts, that, whether conscious of one another's mode of being or no, they in their triumph and we in our toils are bound together with real bonds. The thought, if not the knowledge, of their blessedness may be wafted down to us, just as the thought, if not the knowledge, of our labour may be in their restful souls. The hope of their tranquil shore may strengthen us that are far off upon the sea, though we cannot see more of it than the dim lights moving about, and catch an occasional fragrance in the air that tells of land, just as the memory of their stormy voyage mingles in their

experience with their gladness because the waves be quiet, and God has brought them to their desired haven.

Such thoughts may come with encouragement for the conflict, even if we hesitate to assert that the cloud of witnesses is a cloud of spectators. What, then, is the sense in which these heroes of the faith which the previous chapter has marshalled in a glorious bede-roll, are 'witnesses'? The answer will be found by observing the frequent occurrence of the word, and its cognate words, in that chapter. We read there, for instance, that the elders 'had witness borne to them' (verse 2, Revised Version); that Abel by the acceptance of his sacrifice, 'had witness borne to him that he was righteous,' 'God bearing witness in respect of his gifts' (verse 4, Revised Version); that Enoch 'had witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing unto God' (verse 5, Revised Version), and that the whole illustrious succession 'had witness borne to them through their faith' (verse 39, Revised Version). This witness borne to them by God is, of course, His giving to them the blessings which belong to a genuine faith, whether of conscious acceptance with God, or of inward peace and power, or of outward victory over sorrows and foes. But they become witnesses to us for God by the very same facts by which He makes Himself the witness of their faith, for they therein become proofs of the blessedness of true religion, visible evidences of God's faithfulness, and their histories shine out across the centuries testifying to us in our toils how good it is to trust in the Lord, and how small and transient are the troubles and hindrances that a life of faith meets. The calm stars declare the glory of God, and witness from age to age of His power, which keeps them every one from failing; and these bright names

that shine in the heaven of His word proclaim His tender pity, and His rewarding love to all who, like them, fight the good fight. Like the innumerable suns that make up the Milky Way, they melt into one bright cloud that lies still and eternal above our heads and sheds a radiance on our dim struggles. So we have here brought out the stimulus to our Christian race from the faith and blessedness of these saints.

We have their history before us: we know what they were, and we have the 'end of their conversation'—that is, the issue or outcome of their manner of life—as the next chapter says. It was a hard fight, but it ended in victory. They had more than their share of sorrows and troubles, but 'the glory dies not, and the grief is past.' From their thrones they call to us words of cheer, and point us to their tears turned into diamonds, to their struggles stilled in depths of repose, to their wounded brows crowned with light and glory.

They witness to us how mighty and divine a thing is a life of faith. Their human weakness was filled with the power of God. Tremblings and self-distrust and all the ills that flesh is heir to dwelt in them. Black doubts and sore conflicts were their portion. They, too, knew what we know, how hard it is to live and do the right. But they fought through, because a mightier hand was upon them, and God's grace was breathed into their weakness—and there they stand, victorious witnesses to us, that whosoever will put his trust in the Lord shall have strength according to his need inbreathed into his uttermost weakness, and have One by his side in every furnace, like unto the Son of Man. They witness to us of companions in suffering, and the thought of them may come to a lonely heart wading in dark, deep waters, with the assurance that there is

a ford, and that others have known the icy cold, and the downward rush of the stream, and have not been carried away by it. It is not a selfish thought that sometimes brings encouragement to a solitary sufferer, 'the same afflictions have been accomplished in your brethren.' It helps us to remember the great multitude who before us have come through the great tribulation and are before the throne. The cloud of witnesses testify how impotent is sorrow to harm, how strong to bless those who put their trust in God.

They witness to us of the faithfulness of God, who has led them, and upheld them, through all their conflicts, and has brought them to His side at last. That wondrous power avails for us, fresh and young, as when it helped the world's grey fathers. God refers us to their experiences, and summons them as His witnesses, for they will speak good of His name, and each of them, as they bend down from their seats around the arena, calls to us, 'O love the Lord, all ye His saints. I was brought low and He helped me.' So that we, taking heart by their example, can set ourselves to our struggles with the peaceful confidence, 'This God is our God for ever and ever.'

The word rendered 'witnesses' has a narrower meaning in later usage, according to which it comes to signify those who have sealed their testimony with their blood, in which sense it is transferred, untranslated, into English, in 'martyr.' What an eloquent epitome of the early history of the Church lies in that one fact! So ordinarily had the faithful confessor to die for his testimony that the very name had the thought of a bloody death inextricably associated with it. And if we for a moment think of that meaning, and look back to the long series of martyrs from the days

of Stephen to the last Malagasy Christian or missionary, what solemn scorn of soft delights, and noble contempt of life itself may be kindled in our souls. Easy paths are appointed to us. We 'have not yet resisted unto blood.' Let us run our smoother race with patience, as we think of those who ran theirs with bleeding feet, and through the smoke of Smithfield or the dust of the arena beheld the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing ready to help, and so went to their death with the light from His face changing theirs into the same image.

But let us not forget that all these witnesses for God were imperfect men, whose imperfections are full of encouragement for us. Look at the names in that great muster-roll—Noah with his drunkenness, Jacob with his craft, Samson with his giant strength and giant passion, Jephtha with his savage faithfulness to a savage vow, David with his too well-known sins, and in them all not one name to which some great evil did not cling.

There are quickly reached limits to the veneration with which we are to regard the noblest heroes and saints, and none of them are to be to us patterns, however we may draw encouragement from their lives, and in some respects follow their faith. Thank God for the shameful stories told of so many of them in the unmoved narrative of Scripture! They were men of common clay. The saints' halo is round the head of men and women like ourselves. We look at our own sins and shortcomings, and are ready to despair. But we may lift our eyes to the cloud of witnesses and for every evil of ours find a counterpart in the earthly lives of these radiant saints. Thinking of our own evil we may hopefully say, as we gaze on them, 'Such were some of ye, but ye are washed, and ye are sancti-

fied.' Therefore I will not doubt but that He is able to keep me, even me, 'from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory.'

II. But we are not left to draw encouragement from the remembrance of men of like passions with ourselves only. The second of these clauses turns our thoughts to the contrasted relations between Christ and us, and the stimulus derived from it. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.'

Our Lord is here very emphatically set in a place by Himself apart from all that cloud of witnesses, who in their measure are held forth as noble examples of faith. All these, the greatest names of old, are in one class, and He stands above them in a class of which He is the only member. There we see no other man save Jesus only. Whatever be the inference from that fact, the fact itself is plain. He is something to all the fighters in the lists which none of these are. Our eyes may profitably dwell on them, but we have to look higher than their serene seats, even to His throne, and the relation between us and Him is altogether unlike that which binds us to the holiest of these.

The names He bears in this context are noteworthy, 'the author and finisher of faith,' the former being the same word which, in Acts iii. 15, is rendered 'prince' (of life), and in this Epistle (ii. 10), 'captain' (of salvation). Its meaning may perhaps be best given as 'leader.' All these others are the long files of the great army, but Christ is the Commander of the whole array. 'As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up, said the man with the drawn sword, who stood before Joshua as he brooded outside the walls of Jericho over his task, and that armed angel of the Lord was He who, in the fulness of time, took our humanity that He might

lead the many sons to glory. Not in order of time, but by the precedence of nature, is He the Leader and Lord of all who live by faith.

He is also the finisher, or more properly the perfecter of faith, inasmuch as He in His own life has shown it in its perfect form and power; inasmuch also as He gives to each of us, if we will have it, grace to perfect it in our lives; and inasmuch as, finally, He crowns and rewards it at last.

One more remark as to the force of the language here may be allowed. The word rendered 'looking' is an emphatic compound, and if full force be given to both its elements, we might read it 'looking away,' that is, turning our eyes from all other, even the grandest of these grand witnesses, to gaze on Christ alone.

All these details serve to bring out the unique position which our Lord holds, and the attitude in which we should stand to Him.

Christ is the one perfect example of faith. We are familiar with the rest of His perfect example in regard to other graces of the Christian character, but we dwell less frequently than we ought on Him as having Himself lived a life of faith. Many orthodox believers so believe in Christ's divinity as to weaken their sense of the reality of His manhood, just as, on the other hand, a vivid apprehension of His manhood obscures to many the rays of His divinity. We lose much by not making very real to our minds that Jesus lived His earthly life by faith, that for Him as for us dependence on God, and humble confidence in Him, were the secret of peace, and the spring of power. This very Epistle, in another place, quotes the words of the psalm, 'I will put my trust in Him,' as the very inmost expression of Christ's life, and as one of the ways in

which He proves His brotherhood with us. He, too, knows what it is to hang on God; and is not only in His divine nature the object, but in His true manhood the pattern of our faith.

And His pattern is perfect. In all others, even the loveliest of saints and most heroic of martyrs, the gem is marred by many a streak of baser material, but in Him is the one 'entire and perfect chrysolite.' That faith never faltered, never turned its gaze from the things not seen, never slackened its grasp of the things hoped, nor degenerated into self-pleasing, nor changed its attitude of meek submission. We may look to others for examples, but they will all be sometimes warnings as well, only to Jesus we may look continually and find unsullied purity and perfect faith.

He is more than example. He gives us power to copy His fair pattern. The influence of heroic, saintly lives may be depressing as well as encouraging. Despondency often creeps over us when we think of them. It is not models that we want, for we all know well enough what we ought to be, and an example of supreme excellence in morals or religion may be as hurtful as the unapproachable superiority of Shakespeare or Raphael may to a young aspirant. Perfect patterns will not save the world. They do not get themselves copied. What we want is not the knowledge of what we ought to be, but the will and the power to be it. And that we get from Christ, and from Him alone. He stretches out His hand to hold us up in our poor struggles. His grace and His peace come into our hearts. Looking to Him, His Spirit enters our spirits, and we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us. Models will help us little. They stand there like statues on their pedestals, pure marble loveliness; but in Christ

the marble becomes flesh, and the lovely perfection has a heart to pity and a strong hand stretched out to help. So let us look away from all others, who can only give us example, to Him who can give us strength. Turn from the circling thrones to the imperial throne in the centre. We are more closely bound to Him who sits on it than to them. Look away from the cloud of witnesses to the sun of our souls, from whom, gazing, we receive warmth and light and life. They may teach us to fight, but He fights in us. They are patterns of faith. So is He, but He is also its object and its giver.

Christ is the imperial Rewarder of faith. At the last He will give the full possession of all which it has looked and hoped for, and will lift it into the nobler form in which, even in heaven, we shall live by faith. In that region where struggles cease, and sense and sight no longer lead astray, and we behold Him as He is, faith still abides, as conscious dependence and happy trust. It is perfected in manner, measure, and reward. And Christ is the giver of all that perfects it.

Let us, then, turn away our eyes from all beside, and look to Christ. He is the Reward as well as the Rewarder of our faith. As we look to Him we shall gain power for the fight, and victory and the crown. The gladiators in the arena lowered their swords to the emperor, before they fought, with the grim greeting 'Hail, Cæsar! the dying salute thee.' So, in happier fashion, our Lord, who has Himself fought in the lists where we now strive. Then we shall have strength for the conflict, and when the conflict is drawing to its end and all else swims before our sight, and the din grows faint in our ears, we shall close our eyes in peace; and when we open them again, lo! the bloody field, and the broken sword, and the battered helm, have all dis-

appeared, and we sit, crowned and palm-bearing, at His side, hailed as victors, and lapped in sweetest rest for ever more!

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A RACE

'Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.'—HEB. xii. 1.

THE previous clauses of this verse bring before us the runner's position as 'compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,' and his preparation as 'laying aside every weight and . . . sin.' The text carries us a stage further in the metaphor, and shows us the company of runners standing ready, stripped, and straining at the starting-post, with the long course stretching before them.

The metaphor of the Christian life as a race is threadbare, so far as our knowledge is concerned, but it may be questioned if it has sunk deeply enough into the practice of any of us. It is a very noble one, and contains an ideal of the Christian life which it would do us all good to hold up by the side of our realisation of it. It might stimulate and it would shame us.

What is the special note of that metaphor? Compare with the kindred one, equally well-worn and threadbare, of a journey or a pilgrimage. The two have much in common. They both represent life as changeful, continuous, progressive, tending to an end; but the metaphor of the race underscores, as it were, another idea, that of effort. The traveller may go at his leisure, he may fling himself down to rest under a tree, he may diverge from the road, but the runner must not look askance, must not be afraid of dust or sweat, must tax muscle and lungs to the utmost, if,

panting, he is to reach the goal and win the prize. So, very significantly, our writer here puts forward only one characteristic of the race. It is to be 'run with patience,' by which great word the New Testament means, not merely passive endurance, noble and difficult as that may be, but active perseverance which presses on unmoved, ay, and unhindered, to its goal in the teeth of all opposition.

But, whilst that is the special characteristic of the metaphor, as distinguished from others kindred to it, and of the ideal which it sets forth, I desire in this sermon to take a little wider sweep, and to try to bring out the whole of the elements which lie in this well-worn figure. I see in it four things: a definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced; a God-appointed path; a steady advance; and a strenuous effort. Now let us ask ourselves the question, Do they correspond to anything in my professing Christian life?

We have here, then

I. A definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced.

Most men have aims, definite enough, in regard to lower things, and if you ask the average man out of the ruck what he is living for, he will generally be able to answer curtly and clearly, or at any rate his life will show, even if he cannot put it into words. But all these are means rather than ends; 'I am living to make a big business.' 'I am living to make a fortune.' 'I am living to found a family.' 'I am living to learn a science, an art, a profession.' 'I am living for enjoyment,' etc., etc. Yes, and then suppose somebody perks up with the exceedingly inconvenient further question, 'Well, and what then?' *Then*, all that fabric of life-aims rushes down into destruction, and is

manifest for what it is—altogether disproportionate to the man that is pursuing it. Such shabby, immediate 'aims' are not worth calling so. But my text sets forth far beyond, and far above them, the one only goal which it is becoming, which it is natural, which it is anything else than ludicrous, if it were not so tragical, that any man should be pursuing. And what is that mark? You can put it in a hundred different ways. Evangelical Christian people generally say salvation, and a great many so-called Evangelical Christian people have a very low, inadequate, and selfish idea of what they mean by the word. Let us put it in another form. The only aim that it is worthy of a man to live for, as his supreme and dominant one, is that he shall be completely moulded in character, disposition, nature, heart, and will into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God, and that he shall pass into no Nirvana of unconsciousness, but into that blessed union with the divine nature, which is not absorption into it, or the weakening of the individual, but the making a man tenfold more himself because he lives in God, as the taper plunged into the jar of oxygen, which burns the brighter for its surroundings, and unlike the taper, is unconsumed by burning. Thus the complete development of human character into the divine image, and the complete union of the human with the divine, is the aim that Christianity sets before us.

And that aim it becomes every one of us professing Christians clearly to apprehend, and keep ever in view as the thing to which we are not merely tending, but to which we are striving. Clearly apprehended, and eagerly embraced, this conception of the purpose of our lives must be if we are not to make them ignoble

and conscious or unconscious hypocrisies. But remember that such an aim may be pursued through, and requires for its attainment, all those lower aims and ends which monopolise men's efforts without regard to anything beyond. What we want most is a Christianity which, recognising that great, supreme purpose, follows it persistently and doggedly through all nearer and lesser pursuits. We want our Christian principle to penetrate into all the tissues of our lives, and to bring there healing, purging, and quickening. And if we suppose that the greatest of all aims is contrary to any of these lesser ones, except such of them as are sinful, then we misapprehend both the highest blessedness and good of the nearest objects that are set before us, and still more fatally misapprehend the very genius and intention of that Christianity, which is not unworldliness but the secret of making the world and all its fading sweets subservient to this highest end.

Now, need I say one word as to the nobleness and blessedness of a life which is consistently and thoroughly ordered with a view to this great aim? Think of the unity that thus will be blessedly breathed over all the else bewildering diversity of earthly conditions and occupations. As the moon gathers into one great tidal wave the heaped waters of the shoreless ocean, and mastering currents, and laughing at the opposing powers of the tempest, carries the watery wall round the earth, so the white, pure beam of that aim shining down on the confused welter of our earthly life will draw it all after itself. Think, too, of the power that comes into a life from this unity. A man of one aim is always formidable, and high above all other aims in its absorbing power is this one that a Christian man only

deserves his name if he sets and keeps before him. Such a unity will, if I may so say, gather together the whole power of our nature, and bring it into a point, and it will heat it as well as concentrate it. If you take a bit of blunt iron, cold, and try to bore a hole in a ten-inch plank, you will make little progress; but if you sharpen it to a point, and heat it red-hot, then it will penetrate anything. So my life gathered up into one, and heated, by the very fact of its being concentrated, will pierce through all obstacles, and I shall be strong in the proportion in which 'this one thing I do,' and do it through all other things.

I need not remind you, either, of the blessedness which is involved in this unity of aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced, in so far as it will act as a test of all lower pursuits and objects. Wherever there comes a little rill of fresh water down upon the coral reef the creatures that build it die, and the reef disappears, and thus a great aim will kill all lower ones that work in the dark, creeping and crawling, and that are contrary to itself. Further, this supreme aim is supremely blessed, because it will shine ever before us. There is a blessedness in having an object of pursuit which we never reach. It is better to steer straight to the pole-star, though we never get there, than to creep like the old mariners, from headland to headland, and leave behind us sinking on the backward horizon, purpose after purpose, hope after hope, aim after aim. Better to have it shining ahead.

Let me point out the second idea contained in this metaphor, that of

II. A God-appointed path. The race is 'set before us.' Set before us by whom? The course is staked out and determined by the Judge of the games. And that may

well be applied in two directions. My duties are appointed by God, and if only we realise that, and bring the thought of His will continually into connection with the smallest of the acts which circumstances, relationships, occupations and the like constitute our duties, how different they all become! It is an entirely different thing to say, 'Being where I am, I must do so-and-so'; or 'Right and wrong being what it is, I must do so-and-so'; or to say, 'This and that man prescribes so-and-so for me'; and to say: 'Thou hast prepared a path for us, and ordained that we should walk therein.' That elevates, that sweetens, that calms us, that smooths the road, makes the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. We want with the clear vision of the aim the equally clear and abiding persuasion that God has appointed the path. A modern thinker said that religion was morality touched by emotion. No, religion is morality transfigured into obedience to the law of God. Bring your duties into connection with His appointment, and they will all be easy; and when the path stretches gloomy before you, and it seems that you are called upon to do some hard thing, say: 'Created unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'

Then there is the other thought that, as the duties are appointed by Him, so the circumstances are appointed, too. You know what they call an obstacle-race, in which the intention is to accumulate as many difficulties in the course as can be crowded into it; I fancy that is a good deal like the race that is set before all of us, by God's wisdom. There are many fences to be climbed, many barriers to be crept under, many deep ditches to be waded through, many bad bits of road studded with sharp points, through which we have

to pick our way. We say as to ourselves, and as to our friends, 'What does it all mean?' And the answer is, 'He has set the race before for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness.'

Again, we have here the notion of

III. A steady progress. Continual advance is the very salt of the Christian life, and unless there be such progress there is something fatally wrong with the Christianity. An unprogressive Christianity is very apt to become a moribund and then a dead Christianity. Of course that is so because the aim of which I have been speaking is, in its very nature, inaccessible and yet capable of indefinite approximation. 'Alps upon Alps arise.' Neither in regard to the intellectual or spiritual apprehension of the deep things of God, nor in regard to the incorporation of His likeness into itself, will human nature ever be able to say, 'Lo, I have passed through the land, and know it all.' But an indefinite approximation to an eternally unreached point is a description of a geometrical figure, and it is the description of the Christian life. And, therefore, at no point must we stop, and at no point is it safe for us to say, 'I have apprehended and attained.' Our nature, quite as much as the divine nature towards which we tend, demands this continuous progress, for the human spirit is capable of an indefinite expansion, and the seed of the life kindred to God which is lodged in every believing soul, though it be at the beginning 'less than the least of all,' must grow into a great tree.

Ah, brethren! what a sad contrast to this unbroken progress our lives present to our own consciousness! How many Christian people there are who have almost lost sight of the notion, and have certainly ceased from

the practice of an unbroken advance in either of the directions of which I have been speaking, likeness to God or communion with Him! Ask yourselves the question, 'Am I further on than I was this day last year, this day ten years, this day twenty years?' The Japanese gardeners pride themselves on having the secret of dwarfing forest trees, and they will put an oak into a flower-pot; and there it is, only a few inches high, in age a patriarch, in height a seedling. And that is what a great many of you Christian people are doing, dwarfing the tree; even if you are not distorting it.

And now the last thing that I point out here is

IV. The strenuous effort. I have already said a word or two about that as being the *differentia*, the special characteristic, of this metaphor. And I may just refer for one moment to the fact that the word rendered here 'race,' and quite rightly so rendered, literally means a contest—'Let us run the contest that is set before us.' What does that say? Why, just this, that every foot of advance has to be fought; it is not merely 'running,' it is conflict as well. And then, pointing in the same direction, comes the selection in the text, which I have already touched upon, of the one qualification that is necessary—patient endurance, which suggests antagonism. Opposition—where does the opposition come from? The Apostle asked the Galatians that once. 'Ye did run well; what did hinder you?' And the answers are diverse: flowers by the roadside, golden apples flung across the course, siren voices tempting us, the force of gravity holding us back, the pressure of the wind on our faces. Yes, and my own self most of all. That is what hinders, and that is what has to be fought against by myself. Effort, effort, effort is the secret of all noble life, in all

departments, and it is the secret of advancing Christian life.

Now, let us understand aright the relations between the faith of which the New Testament makes so much and the effort of which this metaphor makes so much. A great many Christian people seem to fancy that faith supersedes effort. Not so! It stimulates and strengthens effort. If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality. They have invented a movable platform at the Paris Exhibition, they tell me, on which a man steps, and having stepped upon it is lazily carried to his destination in the building without lifting a foot or moving a muscle. And some people seem to think that Christianity is a platform of that sort, a 'living way,' on which, if once they get, they may be as idle as they like, and they will reach their journey's end. Not so! Not so! By faith we enter on the race; through faith we receive the power that will make us able to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint. But unless *we* run we shall not advance, and unless we advance we shall not attain. Understand, then, that faith is the basis of effort, and effort is the crown of faith. If we will thus trust ourselves to that Lord, and draw from Him the power which He is infinitely willing to give, then the great vision of the prophet will be fulfilled in our case, and we shall find stretching across the low, swampy levels of this world 'a highway,' and it shall be 'a way of holiness, and no ravenous beast shall come up therein, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they

shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

WEIGHTS AND SINS

'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.'
HEB. xii. 1.

THERE is a regular series of thoughts in this clause, and in the one or two which follow it. 'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us—looking unto Jesus.' That is to say, If we would run well, we must run *light*; if we would run light, we must look to Christ. The central injunction is, 'Let us run with patience'; the only way of doing that is the 'laying aside *all* weights and sin'; and the only way of laying aside the weights and sins is, 'looking unto Jesus.'

Of course the Apostle does not mean some one special kind of transgression when he says, 'the sin which doth so easily beset us.' He is speaking about sin generically—all manner of transgression. It is not, as we sometimes hear the words misquoted, '*that* sin which doth *most* easily beset us.' *All* sin is, according to this passage, a besetting sin. It is the characteristic of every kind of transgression, that it circles us round about, that it is always lying in wait and lurking for us. The whole of it, therefore, in all its species, is to be cast aside if we would run with patience this appointed race. But then, besides that, there is something else to be put aside as well as sin. There is 'every weight' as well as every transgression—two distinct things, meant to be distinguished. The putting away of both

of them is equally needful for the race. The figure is plain enough. We as racers must throw aside the garment that wraps us round—that is to say, 'the sin that easily besets us'; and then, besides that, we must lay aside everything else which weights us for the race —that is to say, certain habits or tendencies within us.

We have, then, to consider these three points;—First, There are hindrances which are not sins. Secondly, If we would run, we must put aside these. And lastly, If we would put them aside, we must look to Christ.

In the first place, there are hindrances which are not sins. The distinction which the writer draws is a very important one. Sin is that which, by its very nature, in all circumstances, by whomsoever done, without regard to consequences, is a transgression of God's law. A 'weight' is that which, allowable in itself, legitimate, perhaps a blessing, the exercise of a power which God has given us—is, for some reason, a hindrance and impediment in *our* running the heavenly race. The one word describes the action or habit by its inmost essence, the other describes it by its accidental consequences. Sin is sin, whosoever does it; but weights may be weights to me, and not weights to you. Sin is sin in whatever degree it is done; but weights may be weights when they are in excess, and helps, not hindrances, when they are in moderation. The one is a legitimate thing turned to a false use; the other is always, and everywhere, and by whomsoever performed, a transgression of God's law.

Then, what are these weights? The first step in the answer to that question is to be taken by remembering that, according to the image of this text we carry them about *with* us, and we are to put them away from ourselves. It is fair to say then, that the whole class of

weights are not so much external circumstances which may be turned to evil, as the feelings and habits of mind by which we abuse God's great gifts and mercies, and turn that which was ordained to be for life into death. The renunciation that is spoken about is not so much the putting away from ourselves of certain things lying round about us, that may become temptations; as the putting away of the dispositions within us which make these things temptations. The other is, of course, included as well; but if we want to understand the true depth of the doctrine of self-denial and self-sacrifice which is taught here, we must remember that the sin and the weights alike lie within our own hearts—that they are our feelings, not God's perfect gifts—that they are our abuse of God's benefits, not the benefits which are given to us for our use. We shall have to see, presently, that by the power which we possess of turning all these outward blessings of God's hands into occasion for transgression, God's most precious endowments may become weights—but let us observe that, accurately and to begin with, the text enjoins us to put away what cleaves to us, and is in us, not what is lying round about us.

Then, if it be mainly and primarily, legitimate feelings and thoughts, abused and exaggerated, which make the weights that we are to lay aside, what are the things which may thus become weights? Oh, brethren! a little word answers that. Everything. It is an awful and mysterious power that which we all possess, of perverting the highest endowments, whether of soul or of circumstances, which God has given us, into the occasions for faltering, and falling back in the divine life. Just as men, by devilish ingenuity, can distil poison out of God's fairest flowers, so we can do

with everything that we have, with all the richest treasures of our nature, with the hearts which He has given us that we may love Him with them; with the understandings which He has bestowed upon us, that we may apprehend His divine truth and His wonderful counsel with them; with these powers of work in the world which He has conferred upon us, that by them we may bring to Him acceptable service and fitting offering; and, in like manner, with all the gladness and grace with which He surrounds our life, intending that out of it we should draw ever occasions for thankfulness, reasons for trust, helps towards God, ladders to assist us in climbing heavenward. Ah! and because we cleave to them too much, because we cleave to them not only in a wrong degree but in a wrong manner (for that is the deepest part of the fault), we may make them all hindrances. So, for instance, in a very awful sense is fulfilled that threatening, 'A man's foes shall be they of his own household,' when we make those that we love best our idols, not because we love them too well, but because we love them apart from God; when instead of drawing from those that are dear to us—our husbands, and wives, and children, and parents, and friends, and every other tender name—lessons of God's infinite goodness, and reasons why our hearts should flow perpetually with love to Him—we stay with them, and hang back from God, and forget that His love is best, His heart deepest, and His sufficiency our safest trust. That is one single instance; and as it is in that sacredest of regions, so is it in all others. Every blessing, every gladness, every possession, external to us, and every faculty and attribute within us, we turn into heavy weights that drag us down to this low spot of earth. We make them all sharp knives

with which we clip the wings of our heavenward tendencies, and then we grovel in the dust.

And now, if this be the explanation of what the Apostle means by 'weights'—legitimate things that hinder us in our course towards God—there comes this second consideration, If we would run we must lay these aside. Why must we lay them aside? The whole of the Christian's course is a fight. We carry with us a double nature. The best of us know that 'flesh lusts against spirit, and spirit against flesh.' Because of that conflict, it follows that if ever there is to be a positive progress in the Christian race, it must be accompanied, and made possible, by the negative process of casting away and losing much that interferes with it. Yes! that race is not merely the easy and natural unfolding of what is within us. The way by which we come to 'the measure of the stature of perfect men' in Christ, is not the way by which these material bodies of ours grow up into their perfectness. They have but to be nourished, and they grow. 'The blade and the ear, and the full corn in the ear,' come by the process of gradual growth and increase. That law of growth is used by our Lord as a description, but only as a partial description, of the way by which the kingdom of Christ advances in the heart. There is another side to it as well as that. The kingdom advances by warfare as well as by growth. It would be easy if it were but a matter of getting more and more; but it is not that only. Every step of the road you have to cut your way through opposing foes. Every step of the road has to be marked with the blood that comes from wounded feet. Every step of the road is won by a tussle and a strife. There is no spiritual life without dying, there is no spiritual growth without putting off

'the old man with his affections and lusts.' The hands cannot move freely until the bonds be broken. The new life that is in us cannot run with patience the race that is set before it, until the old life that is in us is put down and subdued. And if we fancy that we are to get to heaven by a process of persistent growth, without painful self-sacrifice and martyrdom, we know nothing about it. That is not the law. For every new step that we win in the Christian course there must have been the laying aside of something. For every progress in knowledge, there must have been a sacrifice and martyrdom of our own indolence, of our own pride, of our own blindness of heart, of our own perverseness of will. For every progress in devout emotion, there must have been a crucifying and slaying of our earthly affections, of our wavering hearts that are drawn away from God by the sweetness of this world. For every progress in strenuous work for God, there must have been a slaying of the selfishness which urges us to work in our own strength and for our own sake. All along the Christian course there must be set up altars to God on which you sacrifice yourselves, or you will never advance a step. The old legend that the Grecian host lay weather-bound in their port, vainly waiting for a wind to come and carry them to conquest; and that they were obliged to slay a human sacrifice ere the heavens would be propitious and fill their sails, may be translated into the deepest verity of the Christian life. We may see in it that solemn lesson—no prosperous voyage, and no final conquest until the natural life has been offered up on the altar of hourly self-denial. That self-denial must reach beyond gross and undoubted sins. *They* must be swept away, of course, but deeper than these must the sacrificial knife

strike its healing wound. If you would 'run with patience,' you must 'lay aside every weight,' as well as 'the sin which so easily besets you.'

So much for the *why*; well, then, *how* is this laying aside to be performed? There are two ways by which this injunction of my text may be obeyed. The one is, by getting so strong that the thing shall not be a weight, though we carry it; and the other is that feeling ourselves to be weak, we take the prudent course of putting it utterly aside. Or, to turn that into other words: the highest type of the Christian character would be, that we should, as the Apostle says, 'use the world without abusing it'—that 'they who possess should be as though they possessed not; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not.' The noblest style of a Christian would be a man, who exercising all the faculties which God had given him, and enjoying all the blessings wherewith God had surrounded him, walked his Christian course like some of those knights of old, lightly bearing his heavy mail, not feeling it a burden, but strong enough to bear the massive breastplate and to wield the ponderous sword, and fitted for his rough warfare by it all. It would be possible, perhaps, some day for us to come to this—that inasmuch as it is the feelings within us which make the weights, and not the objects without us — we should keep and enjoy the blessings and the gladness that we possess, and yet never thereby be thwarted or stayed in our journey heavenward. It would be the highest condition. I suppose we shall come to it yonder, where there will no longer be any need to maim ourselves that we may 'enter into life,' but where all the maimings that were done in this world for the sake of entering into life,

shall be compensated and restored, and each soul shall stand perfect and complete, wanting nothing.

But, alas! though that course be the highest, the abstract best, the thing for which we ought to strive and try; it is not the course for which the weakness and inaptness of the most of us makes us strong enough. And therefore, seeing that we have a nature so weak and feeble, that temptations surround us so constantly, that so many things legitimate become to us harmful and sinful—the path of prudence, the safe path, is absolutely and utterly to put them away from us, and have nothing to do with them.

Of course, there are many duties which, by our own sinfulness, we make weights, and we dare not, and we cannot if we would, lay *them aside.* A man, for instance, is born into certain circumstances, wherein he must abide; he has 'a calling whereunto he is called.' Your trade is a weight, your daily occupations are weights. The spirit of this commandment before us is not, 'Leave your plough, and go up into the mountain to pray.' Again, a man finds himself surrounded by friends and domestic ties. He dare not, he must not, he cannot, shake himself free from these. There are cases in which to put away the occupation that has become a weight—to sacrifice the blessing that has become a hindrance—to abstain from the circumstances which clog and impede our divine life, is a sin. Where God sets us, we *must* stand, if we die. What God has given us to do, we *must* do. The *duties* that in our weakness become impediments and weights, we *must not* leave.

But for all besides these, anything which I know has become a snare to me—unless it be something in the course of my simple duty, or unless it be some one of

those relations of life which I cannot get rid of—I must have done with it! It may be sweet, it may be very dear, it may lie very near thy heart, it may be a part of thy very being:—never mind, put it away! If God has said to you, There, my child, stand there, surrounded by temptations!—then, like a man, stand to your colours, and do not take these words as if they said—I am to leave a place because I find myself too weak to resist—a place in which God, for the good of others or for the good of myself, has manifestly set me. But for all other provinces of life, if I feel myself weak I shall be wise to fly. As Christ has said, 'If thy hand offend thee,' put it down on the block there, and take the knife in the other, 'and cut it off': it is better, it is *better* for thee to go into life with that maimed and bleeding stump, an imperfect man, than with all thy natural capacities and powers to be utterly lost at the last! And some of us, perhaps, may feel that these solemn lessons apply not only to affection and outward business. I may be speaking to some young man to whom study, and thought, are a snare. I know that I am saying a grave thing, but I do say, In that region too, the principle applies. Better be ignorant, and saved, than wise, and lost. Better a maimed man in Christ's fold, than a perfect man, if that were possible, outside of it.

I know that there is a large field for misconception and misapplication in the settlement of the practical question—Which of my weights arise from circumstances that I dare not seek to alter, and which from circumstances that I dare not leave unaltered? There is a large margin left for the play of honesty of purpose, and plain common-sense, in the fitting of such general maxims to the shifting and complicated details

of an individual life. But no laws can be laid down to save us that trouble. No man can judge for another about this matter. It must be our own sense of what harms our spiritual life, and not other people's notions of what is likely to harm either theirs or ours, that guides us. What *by experience* I find does me harm, let me give up! No man has a right to come to me and say, *There* is a legitimate thing, an indifferent thing; it is not a sin; there is not in it, in itself, the essential element of transgression; but you must forsake it, because it is a weight to other people! To my own master I stand or fall. The commandment is, Have no weights! But the way to fulfil that commandment—whether by rejecting the thing altogether, or by keeping it, and yet not letting it be a weight, that is a matter for every one's own conscience, for every one's own judgment and practical prudence, guided by the Spirit of God, to determine. The obedience to the commandment is a simple matter of loyalty to Christ. But the manner of obedience is to be fixed by Christian wisdom. And remember that on both sides of the alternative there are dangers. There is danger in the too great freedom which says, I am strong; I can venture to do this thing—another man cannot—and I *will* do it! There is a danger on the other side in saying, We are all weak, and we will forsake all these things together! The one class of moralists are apt to confound their own unsanctified inclinations with the dictates of Christian freedom. The other class are apt to confound their own narrowness with the commandments of God. The one class are apt to turn their liberty into a cloak of licentiousness. The other class are apt to turn their obligation into a yoke which neither they nor their disciples are

able to bear. The Apostle pointed out the evils which these two ways of dealing with things indifferent are apt to foster when he said to those who adopt the one, 'Let not him that eateth *despise* him that eateth not'; and to those who adopt the other 'Let not him which eateth not *judge* him that eateth.' That is to say, on the one hand, beware of the fancied superiority to the weaknesses and narrowness of your more scrupulous brother, which is prone to creep into the hearts of the more liberal and strong. Remember that perhaps the difference between you is not all in your favour. It may be that what you call over-scrupulous timidity is the fruit of a more earnest Christian principle than yours; and that what you call in yourself freedom from foolish scruples, is only the result of a less sensitive conscience, not of a more robust Christianity. Then for the other class, the lesson is, 'Let not him which eateth not, *judge* him that eateth.' Judge not from the height of your superior self-denial, your brother who allows himself what you avoid. Your besetting sin is self-righteous condemnation of those who perhaps, after all, are wiser as well as wider than you, and who in their strength may be able to walk as near to God on a road, which to you would be full of perils, as you are in the manner of life which you know to be needful for you. Let us all remember, besides, that a thing which to ourselves is no weight, may yet be right for us to forsake, out of true and tender brotherly regard to others who, weaker than we, or perhaps more conscientious than we, could not do the same thing without damaging their spirits and weakening their Christian life. 'Him that is weak in the faith, receive.' Him that is weak in the faith, help. And in all these matters indifferent, which are weights to one and not

weights to another, let us remember, first, for ourselves, that a weight retained is a sin; and let us remember, next, for others, that they stand not by our experience, but by their own; and that we are neither to judge their strength, nor to offend their weakness.

And now, in the last place: This laying aside of every weight is only possible by looking to Christ. That self-denial of which I have been speaking has in it no merit, no worthiness. The man that practises it is not a bit better than the man that does not, except in so far as it is a preparation for greater reception of the spiritual life. Some people suppose that when they have laid aside a weight, conquered a hindrance, given up some bad habit, they have done a meritorious thing. Well, we are strengthened, no doubt, by the very act; but then, it is of no use at all except in so far as it makes us better fitted for the positive progress which is to come after it. What is the use of the racer betaking himself to the starting-post, and throwing aside every weight, and then standing still? He puts aside his garments *that he may run.* We empty our hearts; but the empty heart is dull, and cold, and dark: we empty our hearts that Christ may fill them.

That is not all: Christ must have begun to fill them before we can empty them. 'Looking to Jesus' is the only means of thorough-going, absolute self-denial. All other surrender than that which is based upon love to Him, and faith in Him, is but surface work, and drives the subtle disease to the vitals. The man that tries, by paring off an excrescence here, and giving up a bad habit there, to hammer and tinker and cut himself into the shape of a true and perfect man, may do it outwardly. He will scarcely do that, but it is

possible he *may* partially. And then, what has he made himself? 'A whited sepulchre'; outside,—adorned, beautiful, clean; inside,—full of rottenness and dead men's bones! The self that was beaten in the open field of outward life, retires, like a defeated army, behind broad rivers; and concentrates itself in its fortresses, and prepares hopefully for a victorious resistance in the citadel of the heart.

My brother, if you would 'run with patience the race that is set before you,' you must 'lay aside every weight.' If you would lay aside every weight, you must look to Christ, and let His love flow into thy soul. Then, self-denial will not be self-denial. It will be blessing and joy, sweet and easy. Just as the old leaves drop naturally from the tree when the new buds of spring begin to put themselves out, let the new affection come and dwell in thy heart, and expel the old. 'Lay aside every weight'—'looking unto Jesus.' Then, too, you will find that the sacrifice and maiming of the old man has been the perfecting of *the man.* You will find that whatever you give up for Christ you get back from Christ, better, more beautiful, more blessed, hallowed to its inmost core, a joy and a possession for ever. For He will not suffer that any gift laid upon His altar shall not be given back to us. He will have no maimed man in His service. So, the hand that is cut off, the eye that is plucked out, the possessions that are rendered up, the idols that are slain—they are all given back to us again when we stand in God's own light in glory—perfect men, made after the image of Christ, and surrounded with all possessions transfigured and glorified in the light of God. 'There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for

the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

THE PERFECTER OF FAITH

'Set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'—Heb. xii. 2.

St. Luke gives us two accounts of the Ascension, one at the end of his Gospel and one at the beginning of the Acts. The difference of position suggests delicate shades of colouring and of distinction in the two narratives, the one is the ending of the sweet intercourse on earth, the other is the beginning of a new era and a different type of companionship. So in that which closes the Gospel, emphasis is put upon our Lord's ascension as being *parted from;* and all that is told us is of the final benediction befitting a farewell, and of the uplifted hands, which left upon their minds the last sweet impression of the departing friend. But if we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, where the incident is the same, the whole spirit of the narrative is altered. We see there the beginning of a new era, and so we read nothing about parting, but, instead of the indefinite expression, *He blessed them*, we hear of their promised investiture with a new power, and of there being laid upon them a new obligation—'Ye shall be clothed with the Spirit: ye shall be My witnesses.' And the two men who stand by them, and are only mentioned in the Book of Acts, announce the great thought, that the departing Christ will return, 'He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' All in that account has a forward aspect. It is a

beginning with a new power, strengthened by a new duty, and having a far-off hope. Thus equipped, these eleven no more feel that their Lord is parted from them, nor that they are abandoned and forlorn; but they cast themselves into their new circumstances, and joyfully take up their new work. So the Ascension of Christ is represented in that second account as being the transition from the earthly to the heavenly life and type of communion with Him, and as the preparation for that great fact which my text enshrines in highly figurative language, as being the sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. The Ascension is no transient fact, it is the beginning of the permanent condition of the Church, and of the permanent present relations between Jesus Christ, God, the Church, and the world. So I desire to turn now to the various characteristics of the present and permanent relationship of Jesus Christ to these three—God, the Church, the world.

And first of all I wish to notice we have here the thought of the Enthroned Christ. The attitude of sitting indicates repose. The position at the right hand of the throne of God indicates participation in the divine energies and in the administration of the divine providences. But the point to observe is that the Ascension is declared to be the prerogative of the Man Christ Jesus. And so with great emphasis and significance, in the verse with a part of which I am now dealing, we have brought together the name of the humanity, the name that was borne by many another Jew in the same era as Jesus bore it, we have brought together the name of the humanity and the affirmation of the divine dignity, 'We see *Jesus* . . . set down at the right hand of the throne of God.' And over and

over again, not only in this Epistle, but in other parts of Scripture, we have the same intentional, emphatic juxtaposition of the two ideas which shallow thinkers regard as in some sense incompatible—the humanity and the divinity.

Remember, for instance, 'this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' And remember the rapturous and wonderful exclamation which broke from the lips of the proto-martyr. 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' So then that exaltation and ascension is—according to New Testament teaching, which is not contradicted by the deepest thought of the affinities and resemblances of the divine and the human—the lifting up of the *Man* into the glory which the Incarnate Word had with the Father before the world was. And just as the earthly life of that Incarnate Word has shown how divine a thing a human life here may be, so the heavenly life of the still Incarnate Word shows us what our approximation to, and union with, the divine nature may be, when we are purged and perfected in the Kingdom of God, whither the Forerunner is for us entered.

But further, in addition to this thought, there comes another which is constantly associated with the teaching of this session of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, namely, that it is *intercessory*. That is a word the history of which will take us far, and I dare not enter upon it now. But one thing I wish to make very emphatic, and that is that the ordinary notion of intercession is not the New Testament notion. We limit it, or tend to limit it, to prayer for others. There is no such idea in the New Testament use of the phrase. It is a great deal wider than any verbal expression of

sympathy and desire. It has to deal with realities and not with words. It is not a synonym for asking for another that some blessing may come upon him; but the intercession of the great High Priest who has gone into the holiest of all for us covers the whole ground of the acts by which, by reason of our deep and true union with Jesus Christ through faith, He communicates to His children whatsoever of blessing and power and sweet tokens of ineffable love He has received from the Father. Whatsoever He draws in filial dependence from the Divine Father He in brotherly unity imparts to us; and the real communication of real blessing, and not the verbal petitions for forgiveness, is what He is doing there within the veil. 'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.'

But still further in this great figure of my text, the Enthroned Christ, there lies a wondrous thought which He Himself has given us, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' What activities are involved in that wondrous idea it boots us not to inquire, nor would it become us to say. We know that never could we tread those pure pavements except our robes and our feet had been washed by Him. But that is the consequence of His earthly work, and not of His heavenly and present energy. Perhaps in our ignorance of all that lies behind the veil, we can get little further than to see that the very fact of His presence is the preparation of the place. For that awful thought, that crushing thought, of eternal life under conditions bewilderingly different from anything we experience here, would be no joy unless we could say we shall see Him and be with Him. I know not how it may be with you, but I think that the nearer we come to the end of

the earthly life, and the more the realities beyond begin to press upon our thoughts and our imaginations as those with which we shall soon make acquaintance, we feel more and more how unquestionable the misery the thought of eternal life would bring if it were not for the fact that the world beyond is lighted up and made familiar by the thought of Christ's presence there. Can you fancy some poor clod-hopping rustic brought up from a remote village and set down all in a moment in the midst of some brilliant court? How out of place he would feel, how unhomelike it would appear, how ill at ease he would be; ay, and what an unburdening there would be in his heart, if amongst the strange splendour he detected beneath the crown and above the robes, sitting on the throne, one whom he had known in the far-off hamlet, and who there had taken part with him in all the ignoble toils and narrow interests of that rustic scene. Jesus said, 'I go to prepare a place for you,' and when I lift up my eyes to those far-off realities which overwhelm me when I try to think about them, I say, I am not dazzled by the splendour, I am not oppressed by the perpetuity of it, I do not faint at the thought of unlike conditions, for I shall be the same and He will be with me.

> 'It is enough that Christ knows all,
> And I shall be with Him.'

And so the Enthroned Christ is preparing a place for us. Ay, brethren, and He is not preparing it for us only when we die, but He is preparing it for us whilst we live; for it is only by faith in Him that we have boldness of access and confidence. And neither for the prayers and desires of Christian men on earth nor for the spirits of just men made perfect hereafter will the

eternal golden gates swing open except His hand is on the bolt, and by His power the way into the Holiest is made manifest. And so set your minds as well as your affections on the things above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God.

Now, secondly, we have here the *Present Christ.* Matthew, in his Gospel, does not tell of the Ascension, but he preserves the promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world,' and that promise is not contradicted, but is realised by the fact of Christ's ascension. He does tell us of the remarkable utterance to Mary on the morning of the Resurrection. 'Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father.' The implication that we have plainly is, when I am ascended you may touch. And the contact of even her nervous and clutching hand round His feet is less than the touch and the presence for which that departure makes the way. 'He was parted from them' is the thought that ends the Gospel. He was parted for a season that thou mightest receive Him for ever, s the thought that begins the Acts and the history of the Church. And it is true of Him and His relation to us, and because it is true about Him and about His relation to us, it is also true about all those who sleep in Jesus. Their relation towards the earthly form ceases, and there is an empty place where they once stood.

But there is a presence more real and capable of yielding finer influences, strengthening and sanctifying, than ever came from the earthly presence. It is blessed to clasp hands, it is blessed to link arms, it is blessed to press together the lips; but there is a higher touch than these, and sight is a less clear vision than faith; and they who can pass across the abyss of the centuries

and the yet broader and deeper and blacker abyss between earth and heaven, and lay the hand of faith on the hand of Christ, have passed through the veil, that is to say His flesh, and have clasped His real presence. Yes, and the thing that calls itself such, is but a part of the general retrogression of Catholicism to heathenism and materialism. We have the real presence if we have the Christ in our heart by faith. He is present with us; enthroned on high above all heavens, He yet is near the humblest heart, the companion of the lonely, the solace of all that trust Him. 'He trod the winepress alone,' in order that none of us need ever live alone or die alone.

And there is another side to this presence. As I have said, He is present with us here, and you and I may be present with Him yonder; for one of the Epistles tells us that, 'we die with Him that we may live with Him, and that God has quickened us (if we are Christian people) together with Him and made us sit together with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Your life, Christian men and women, is in its roots and sources, and ought to be in its flow and course, 'hid with Christ in God,' and you should not only seek to realise the presence of the Master with you, but to climb to Himself, being present with Him.

Thirdly, this great figure of my text sets before us the working Christ. The attitude of sitting at the right hand of God suggests repose; but that is a repose which is consistent with, and is accompanied by, the greatest energy for continuous operation. You remember, no doubt (although, perhaps, not in its full significance), the great words with which the close of St. Mark's Gospel points on to the future, 'So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into

heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went everywhere preaching the word.' The Master gone, the servants left; the Master resting, the servants journeying and toiling. It is like the two halves of Raphael's great transfiguration picture. The Lord and the three are up there in the amber light, the demoniac boy writhing in his convulsions, and the disciples by him helpless, down here. The gap is great. Yes. 'They went everywhere preaching the Word, the Lord also working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.' There is the true notion of the repose of Christ resting indeed at the right hand of God, yet working with His servants scattered over the face of the earth. And so in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the keynote is struck when St. Luke says, 'The former treatise have I made of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day on which He was taken up'; and *this* treatise, O Theophilus, is the second volume of the one story, the history of all that Jesus continued both to do and to teach after the day on which He was taken up. Acts of the Apostles? No; Acts of the Ascended Christ—that is the name of the book. Never mind about the apostles. They do come into the foreground; but the writer has little care about them. It is the Christ who is moving; and so we find it all through the book, the Lord did this, the Lord did that, the Lord did the other thing; and the apostles are, I was going to say, the pawns on the chess-board. And so you remember, too, that dying Stephen saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He sprang to his feet, not breaking the eternal repose, to look down and to send down help and sustenance and blessing and good cheer to the man there at the foot of the old wall ready to die for Him.

And that is the type of the whole history of the Church. I have said that Christ's Ascension is the transition from the lower to the higher form of presence; and it is the transition to the wider form of work. He works for us, on us, in us, and with us, and as the apostle Peter said in expounding the significance of the Day of Pentecost, 'Being to the right hand of God exalted He hath shed forth this,' so the Christ is no longer tired, but is still working, working in us, with us, and for us.

And lastly, the metaphor of my text brings before us the returning Christ. It was not only the angel's message that declared that departure and ascension were not the last that the worker was going to see of Jesus. The necessities of the case, if I may say so, tell us the same message. The Incarnation necessarily involves the Crucifixion; the Crucifixion (if it is what we believe it to be) as necessarily involves the Resurrection, 'for it was not possible that He should be holden of it,' the grim death. The Resurrection and the Ascension are but as it were the initial point, which is produced into the line of His heavenly session. It cannot be that Ascension is the last word to be said. The path of the King does not run into a *cul de sac* like that. The world has not done with Jesus Christ. *He is coming*, was the great thought around which all the past clustered. He will come, is the great hope around which all the future hopes for the Church and the world are piled and built. 'He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go,' corporeally, visibly, locally, in His manhood, in His divinity. 'As He was once offered to bear the sin of many, so shall He come the second time without sin unto salvation.' Brethren, that is the hope of the Church, discredited by many unworthy

representations and mixed up with a great deal that does not commend it by the folly of those who believe in it; but standing out so distinct and so required by all that is gone before, that no Christian man can afford to relegate the expectation into the region of dimness, or to waver in his faith in it, without much imperilling his conception of his Master, and the blessedness of union with Him. You do not understand the Cross unless you believe in the throne; and you do not understand the throne unless you believe in the judgment-seat. The returning Christ shall judge the world. Brethren! Jesus is enthroned. Do you bow to His command? Do you trust His power? Do you see in Him the pattern of what you may be, and the pledge that you will be it if you put your confidence in your Lord? The enthroned Christ is present. Do you walk in blessed and continuous communion with Him? The enthroned and present Christ is working. Do you trust in His operation, peacefully, for yourself, for the Church, for the world? Do you open your heart to the abundant energies with which He is flooding His Church, and which His Church is so sadly and so much allowing to run to waste? The enthroned, present, working Christ is coming back, and you and I have to choose whether we shall be of 'the servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching,' and obeying His command with girt loins and lit lamps, and so will sweep with Him into the festal hall, and sit down with Him, on His throne; or whether we shall wail because of Him, and shrink abashed from the judgment-seat of Christ.

RESISTING UNTO BLOOD

'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.'—HEB. xii. 4.

'YE have not yet resisted'—then others had done so; and the writer bids his readers contrast their own comparative immunity from persecution from the fate of such, in order that they may the more cheerfully do the easier task devolved upon them. Who were those others?

If the supposition of many is correct that this Epistle was addressed to the Mother Church at Jerusalem, the fate of Stephen the first martyr, and of James the brother of John, who had 'had the rule over' that Church, may have been in the writer's mind. If the date assigned to the letter by some is accepted, the persecution under Nero, which had lighted the gardens of the Capitol with living torches, had already occurred; and the writer may have wished the Jerusalem Church to bethink themselves that they had fared better than their brethren in Rome. But whether these conjectures are adopted or no, there is another contrast evidently in the writer's mind. He has been speaking of the long series of heroes of the faith, some of whom had been 'stoned and sawn asunder,' and he would have the Christians whom he addresses contrast their position with that of these ancient saints and martyrs. And there is another contrast more touching still, more wonderful and impressive, in his mind; for my text follows immediately upon a reference to Jesus Christ, 'who endured the Cross, despising the shame.' So Himself 'had resisted unto blood.' And thus the writer bids his readers think of the martyrs in the Mother Church; of the blood that had deluged the

Church at Rome; of the slaughtered saints in past generations; and, above all, of the great Captain of their salvation; and, animated by the thoughts, manfully to bear and mightily to resist in the conflict that is laid upon them. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.'

I. So then, we have here, to begin with, the permanent condition of the Christian life, as one of warfare and resistance.

The imagery of the whole context is drawn from the arena. A verse or two before the writer was speaking about the race. Now he slightly shifts his point of view, and is speaking rather about the wrestling or the pugilistic encounters that were there waged. And his point is that always, and everywhere, however the forms may vary in which the conflict is carried on, there is inseparable from the Christian life an element of effort, endurance and antagonism. That is worth thinking about for a moment. It is all very well to sing of green pastures and still waters, and to rejoice in the blessings, the consolations, the tranquillities, the raptures of Christian experience, and to rejoice in the thought of the many mercies for body and soul which come to men through faith. That is all true and all blessed, but it is only one side of the truth. And unless we have apprehended, and have reduced to practice and experience the other side of the Christian life, which makes it a toil and a pain to the lower self, and a continual resistance, I venture to say that we have no right to the soothing and sweet and tender side of it; and have need to ask ourselves whether we know anything about Christianity at all. It is not given to us merely—it is not given to us chiefly—to secure those great and precious things which it does secure, but it is

given to us in order that, enriched and steadied and strengthened by the possession of them, we should be the better fit for the conflict, just as a wise commander will see that his soldiers are well fed before he flings them into the battle.

But then, passing from that, which is only a side issue, let me remind you of what our antagonist is—'striving against *sin*.'

Now some people would take my text to mean solely the conflict which each of us has to wage with our own evils, meannesses and weaknesses. And some, guided by the context, would take the reference to be exclusively to the antagonisms with evils round about us, and with the embodiment of these in men who do not share Christian views of life or conduct. But I think that neither the one nor the other of these two exclusive interpretations can be maintained. For sin is one, whether embodied in ourselves or embodied in men or in institutions. And we have the same conflict to wage against precisely the same antagonist when we are occupied in the task of purging ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and when we are occupied in the wider task of seeking to bring every man to recognise the power of Christ's love, and to live in purity by obedience to Him.

And so, the first field on which every Christian is to win his spurs, to prove his prowess, and to exercise his strength is the field within, where the lists are very narrow, and where self wages war against self in daily conflict. Every man of us carries his own worst enemy inside his own waistcoat. We have all lusts, passions, inclinations, desires, faults, vices, meannesses, selfishnesses, indolences,—a whole host of evils lying there like a nest of vipers within

us, and our first task, and our lifelong task, is to take the sting and the poison out of these, and to throttle them and to cast them out.

And then, and only after that, there comes the next thing—viz., the antagonism in which Christian men must permanently stand to a world which does not sympathise with their views, which is strange to the maxims that rule their lives, and which renders no fealty to the King whom they are sworn to obey. And that antagonism runs out into various forms.

First of all, it is the solemn duty of every Christian to wage war so as to prevent himself from being caught up in the current of godless living which prevails round him. We have to fight to keep ourselves from being harmed by the world and the worldly communities amidst which we dwell. What would become of the captain of a ship who did not take care to have his compass corrected so as to neutralise the effects of all the mass of iron in his vessel? You walk as in the wards of a hospital. If you do not take precautions you will catch the disease that is in the air. It is as certain that careless Christian people who do not ever keep on guard against impending and surrounding evil shall be infected by it, as it is certain that if an Englishman goes out, say to the United States, he will come back with the intonations of our brethren on the other side of the Atlantic slipping unconsciously from his tongue. The first duty, imperative upon Christian people, is to realise that they live in the midst of an order of things that is not in accordance with the Master's principles, and so to beware that they do not catch the infection.

I do not need to say a word about the other form of antagonism, which is equally imperative, and which

will prevent us from caring much about the judgments that may be formed of us by the people round us. 'With me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.'

But the resistance against sin, which is the Christian man's merciful warfare in the world, is not completed either by his keeping himself from complicity with surrounding evils or by his refusing to let antagonism divert him from his course. There is something more that is plain duty, and that is, that every Christian should be Christ's soldier in the attempt to get Christ's commandments recognised, and the principles of His word obeyed, in the world.

Society is not organised on Christian principles. You have only to look around you to see that. I do not need to dwell upon the various discordances between the plain teachings of this Book and every community, and every nation, and every individual; but let me remind you that until the Sermon on the Mount is the law for individuals and communities, the Christian man, if he is loyal to his Lord, must be 'striving against sin' in the endeavour to get established Christ's kingdom, which is the kingdom of righteousness. That sermon does not contain all Christian truth, but it is the Magna Charta of an applied Christianity; the laws of the kingdom from the lips of the King Himself.

So, brethren, I come to you with this for my message, that no Christian man is doing his work as Christ's soldier, 'striving against sin,' until he is seeking, with the best of his strength, to get Christ's law, which is righteousness, established on the face of the earth.

Talk of dynamiters and explosives, why, there is explosive power enough in Christianity to shatter to pieces the corruptions which make so large a part of

modern social life. But, alas! the Christian Church has too long and too generally been employed in damping down the gunpowder instead of firing it, and seeking to explain away the large and plain commandments of the Master, instead of seeking to apply them.

There is a new spirit springing up around us to-day, for which we should be devoutly thankful, whilst at the same time we must forget that, like all new movements, it is apt to be one-sided and exaggerated. Much harm is done, I believe, in many directions by Christian teachers seeking to apply the principles of Christ's commandments to various phases of social iniquity without a clear knowledge of the facts of the case. But that being fully admitted, I still rejoice to believe that Christ's men round about us are waking up, as they never did before, to the solemn obligation laid upon Christian churches, if they are not to perish of inanition and inactivity, to proclaim and seek to have recognised Christ's laws for the individual and Christ's law for the community.

Only remember the limitations and the antecedents about which I have already spoken a word. No man has any business to go crusading among other people until he has cleansed himself. And the first task of the Christian reformer is with his own heart. And again, it is useless to deal with institutions unless you deal with the men who live under them. The main work of the Christian Church must ever be with individuals, and through their improvement the improvement of society will be most fully secured. But the error of many good and earnest men to-day is in thinking that if you set the 'environment,' as they call it, right you will get the men right. It is a mistake. Take a pack of drunken wastrels out of the slums and put

them into model lodging-houses, and in a fortnight the lodging-houses will be as dirty as the sties from which the men were dragged. Mend the men, and then you may hopefully set them in new environment; mend the men, and society will be mended. And, mend yourselves first, and then you will be able to mend society. Resist your own sin, and then go out to fight with the sin of others.

II. Notice the brunt of the battle which has been borne by others.

I have already said that the immediate context suggests two contrasts between the comparative immunity from persecution of the readers of the letter and certain others.

The first is that suggested by all that glorious muster-roll of heroes and martyrs of the faith which precedes this chapter. And I may say without dealing in rhetoric, or dilating on the subject, that Christian men in this generation may well bethink themselves of what it was that their fathers bore, and did, that has won for them this ease.

I remember an old church, on the slopes of one of the hills of Rome, which is covered over on all its interior walls with a set of the most gruesome pictures of the martyrs. There may be an unwholesome admiration and adoration of these. I think modern Christianity, in its complacency with itself, and this marvellous nineteenth century, of which we are so proud, would be all the better if it went back sometimes to remember that there were times when 'young men and maidens, and old men and children,' had to resist to blood; and when they went to their deaths as joyfully as a bride to the altar.

Ah, brethren! you Nonconformists in this generation,

who have an easy-going religion, do not always remember how it was won. Think of George Fox and the Friends. Think of the early Nonconformists, hunted and harried, their noses slit and ears cropped off, their pillories and exile, and then be ashamed to talk about the difficulties that you have to meet. '*Ye* have not resisted unto blood.'

There is a far more touching contrast suggested, and apparently mainly in the writer's mind, because just before he has said, 'Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners.' The word that he employs for 'consider' might be rendered 'compare, weigh in the balance,' Christ's sufferings and yours. He has borne the heavy end of the Cross of which He lays the light end upon our shoulders. Of course the more mysterious and profound aspects of Christ's death, in which He is no pattern for us, but the propitiation for our sins, do not come into view in this contrast. They are abundantly treated in the rest of the letter. But here the writer is thinking of Jesus Christ in His capacity of the Prince of sufferers for righteousness' sake, who could have escaped His Cross if He had chosen to abandon His warfare and His witness. Jesus Christ is a great deal more than that. And the *differentia* of His sufferings and death is not touched by such a consideration. But do not let us forget that He *is* that, and that whatever else His death is, it stands also as being the very climax of all suffering for righteousness. He is the King of the martyrs as well as the Sacrifice for the world's sin. Let us turn to Him, and mark the heroic strength of character, hidden from hasty observation by the sweet gentleness in which it was enshrined, like the iron hand in a velvet glove. Let us understand how His pattern is held forth to us,

and how the Cross is our example, as well as the ground of all our hope. 'Ye have not yet resisted. . . . Consider Him.'

III. And now, lastly, note the lighter warfare incumbent upon us.

The resistance changes its form, but in essence it continues. In old days warfare consisted in men bludgeoning each other, or engaging in hand-grips foot to foot and face to face. Nowadays it is artillery duels—a great deal more scientific, a great deal less coarse; but it is warfare all the same. The world used to burn Christians, to hang them, to stone them. It does not do that now, but it fights them yet. The world has become partially Christianised, and the principles of Christianity have, in a certain imperfect way, infiltrated themselves through the mass, so that the antagonism is not quite as hot as it once was. And the Church has weakened its testimony and largely adopted the maxims of the world. So why should the world persecute a Church which is only a bit of the world under another name? But let any man for himself honestly try to live a life modelled on Christ's maxims, and let him cast himself against some of the clamant evils round about him, and seek to subdue them, because Christ has bidden him, and he will see whether the old antagonism is not there yet. What a chorus of select epithets will immediately be discharged! 'Impracticable,' 'fanatical,' 'one-sided,' 'revolutionary,' 'sour visaged,' 'Pharisee,' 'hypocrite.' These will be the sweet-smelling flowers in the garland that will be woven. Depend upon it, a Christian man who is bent on living out Christianity for himself, and on seeking to apply it around him, will have to fight and endure.

But all that is as nothing—nothing—to what the front rank had to go through, and went through, joyfully. They fell in the trenches and filled them up, that the rear rank might pass across. They bore sword stabs; we have only to bear pin pricks. Stones were flung at them, as at Stephen outside the wall; handfuls of mud are all that we have to be afraid of.

So, brethren, accept thankfully to-day's form of the permanent conflict, and see that you do unmurmuringly, cheerfully, and thoroughly the task that is laid upon you. And do not think much of the discomforts and annoyances. For us to speak about sacrifices for Christ is as if a bargeman on a canal were to dilate on the perils of his voyage in the hearing of an Arctic explorer; or as if a man that went in a first-class carriage to London were to speak to an African traveller about 'the perils of the road.' 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood. 'Consider Him'; and take up your cross, and follow Him.

A FATHER'S DISCIPLINE

'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.'—HEB. xii. 10.

FEW words of Scripture have been oftener than these laid as a healing balm on wounded hearts. They may be long unnoticed on the page, like a lighthouse in calm sunshine, but sooner or later the stormy night falls, and then the bright beam flashes out and is welcome. They go very deep into the meaning of life as discipline; they tell us how much better God's

discipline is than that of the most loving and wise of parents, and they give that superiority as a reason for our yielding more entire and cheerful obedience to Him than we do to such.

Now, to grasp the full meaning of these words, we have to notice that the earthly and the heavenly disciplines are described in four contrasted clauses, which are arranged in what students call inverted parallelism—that is to say, the first clause corresponds to the fourth and the second to the third. 'For a few days' pairs off with 'that we might be partakers of His holiness.' Now, at first sight that does not seem a contrast; but notice that the 'for' in the former clause is not the 'for' of duration, but of direction. It does not tell us the space during which the chastisement or discipline lasts, but the end towards which it is pointed. The earthly parent's discipline trains a boy or girl for circumstances, pursuits, occupations, professions, all of which terminate with the brief span of life. God's training is for an eternal day. It would be quite irrelevant to bring in here any reference to the length of time during which an earthly father's discipline lasts, but it is in full consonance with the writer's intention to dwell upon the limited scope of the one and the wide and eternal purpose of the other.

Then, as for the other contrast—'for their own pleasure,' or, as the Revised Version reads it, 'as seemed good to them'—'but He for our profit.' Elements of personal peculiarity, whim, passion, limited and possibly erroneous conceptions of what is the right thing to do for the child, enter into the training of the wisest and most loving amongst us; and we often make a mistake and do harm when we think we are doing good. But God's training is all from a simple

and unerring regard to the benefit of His child. Thus the guiding principles of the two disciplines are contrasted in the two central clauses.

Now, these are very threadbare, commonplace, and old-fashioned thoughts; but, perhaps, they are so familiar that they have not their proper power over us; and I wish to try in this sermon, if I can, to get more into them, or to get them more into us, by one or two very plain remarks.

I. I would ask you to note, first, the grand, deep, general conception, here firmly laid hold of, of life as only intelligible when it is regarded as education or discipline.

God corrects, chastens, trains, educates. That is the deepest word about everything that befalls us. Now, there are involved in that two or three very obvious thoughts, which would make us all calmer and nobler and stronger, if they were vividly and vitally present to us day by day.

The first is that all which befalls us has a will behind it and is co-operant to an end. Life is not a heap of unconnected incidents, like a number of links flung down on the ground, but the links are a chain, and the chain has a staple. It is not a law without a law-giver that shapes men's lives. It is not a blind, impersonal chance that presides over it. Why, these very meteors that astronomers expect in autumn to be flying and flashing through the sky in apparent wild disorder, all obey law. Our lives, in like manner, are embodied thoughts of God's, in as far as the incidents which befall in them are concerned. We may mar, we may fight against, may contradict the presiding divine purpose; but yet, behind the wild dance of flashing and transitory lights that go careering all over the sky,

there guides, not an impersonal Power, but a living, loving Will. *He*, not *it*; He, not *they*, men, circumstances, what people call second causes—*He* corrects, and He does it for a great purpose.

Ah! if we believed that, and not merely said it from the teeth outwards, but if it were a living conviction with us, do you not think our lives would tower up into a nobleness, and settle themselves down into a tranquillity all strange to them to-day?

But, then, further, there is the other thought to be grasped, that all our days we are here in a state of pupilage. The world is God's nursery. There are many mansions in the Father's house; and this earth is where He keeps the little ones. That is the true meaning of everything that befalls us. It is education. Work would not be worth doing if it were not. Life is given to us to teach us how to live, to exercise our powers, to give us habits and facilities of working. We are like boys in a training ship that lies for most of the time in harbour, and now and then goes out upon some short and easy cruise; not for the sake of getting anywhere in particular, but for the sake of exercising the lads in seamanship. There is no meaning worthy of us—to say nothing of God—in anything that we do, unless it is looked upon as schooling. We all say we believe that. Alas! I am afraid very many of us forget it.

But that conception of the meaning of each event that befalls us carries with it the conception of the whole of this life, as being an education towards another. I do not understand how any man can bear to live here, and to do all his painful work, unless he thinks that by it he is getting ready for the life beyond; and that 'nothing can bereave him of the force he

made his own, being here.' The rough ore is turned into steel by being

> 'Plunged in baths of hissing tears,
> And heated hot with hopes and fears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom.'

And then—what then? Is an instrument, thus fashioned and tempered and polished, destined to be broken and 'thrown as rubbish to the void'? Certainly not. If this life is education, as is obvious upon its very face, then there *is* a place where we shall exercise the faculties that we have acquired here, and manifest in loftier forms the characters which here we have made our own.

Now, brethren, if we carry these thoughts with us habitually, what a difference it will make upon everything that befalls us! You hear men often maundering and murmuring about the mysteries of the pain and sorrow and suffering of this world, wondering if there is any loving Will behind it all. That perplexed questioning goes on the hypothesis that life is meant mainly for enjoyment or for material good. If we once apprehended in its all-applicable range this simple truth, that life is a discipline, we should have less difficulty in understanding what people call the mysteries of Providence. I do not say it would interpret everything, but it would interpret an immense deal. It would make us eager, as each event came, to find out its special mission and what it was meant to do for us. It would dignify trifles, and bring down the overwhelming magnitude of the so-called great events, and would make us lords of ourselves, and lords of circumstances, and ready to wring the last drop of

possible advantage out of each thing that befell us. Life is a Father's discipline.

II. Note the guiding principle of that discipline.

'They . . . as seemed good to them.' I have already said that, even in the most wise and unselfish training by an earthly parent, there will mingle subjective elements, peculiarities of view and thought, and sometimes of passion and whim and other ingredients, which detract from the value of all such training. The guiding principle for each earthly parent, even at the best, can only be his conception of what is for the good of his child; and oftentimes that is not purely the guide by which the parent's discipline is directed. So the text turns us away from all these incompletenesses, and tells us, 'He for our profit'—with no sidelong look to anything else, and with an entirely wise knowledge of what is best for us, so that the result will be always and only for our good. This is the point of view from which every Christian man ought to look upon all that befalls him.

What follows? This, plainly: there is no such thing as evil except the evil of sin. All that comes is good—of various sorts and various complexions, but all generically the same. The inundation comes up over the fields, and men are in despair. It goes down; and then, like the slime left from the Nile in flood, there is better soil for the fertilising of our land. Storms keep sea and air from stagnating. All that men call evil in the material world has in it a soul of good.

That is an old, old commonplace; but, like the other one, of which I have been speaking, it is more often professed than realised, and we need to be brought back to the recognition of it more entirely than we ordinarily

are. If it be that all my life is paternal discipline, and that God makes no mistakes, then I can embrace whatever comes to me, and be sure that in it I shall find that which will be for my good.

Ah, brethren, it is easy to say so when things go well; but, surely, when the night falls is the time for the stars to shine. That gracious word should shine upon some of us in to-day's perplexities, and pains, and disappointments, and sorrows—'He for our profit.'

Now, that great thought does not in the least deny the fact that pain and sorrow, and so-called evil, are very real. There is no false stoicism in Christianity. The mission of our troubles would not be effected unless they did trouble us. The good that we get from a sorrow would not be realised unless we did sorrow. 'Weep for yourselves,' said the Master, 'and for your children.' It is right that we should writhe in pain. It is right that we should yield to the impressions that are made upon us by calamities. But it is not right that we should be so affected as that we should fail to discern in them this gracious thought—'for our profit.' God sends us many love-tokens, and amongst them are the great and the little annoyances and pains that beset our lives, and on each of them, if we would look, we should see written, in His own hand, this inscription: 'For your good.' Do not let us have our eyes so full of tears that we cannot see, or our hearts so full of regrets that we cannot accept, that sweet, strong message.

The guiding principle of all that befalls us is God's unerring knowledge of what will do us good. That will not prevent, and is not meant to prevent, the arrow from wounding, but it does wipe the poison off the

arrow, and diminish the pain, and should diminish the tears.

III. Lastly, here we see the great aim of all the discipline.

The earthly parent trains his son, or her daughter, for earthly occupations. These last a little while. God trains us for an eternal end: 'that we should be partakers of His holiness.' The one object which is congruous with a man's nature, and is stamped on his whole being, as its only adequate end, is that he should be like God. Holiness is the Scriptural shorthand expression for all that in the divine nature which separates God from, and lifts Him above, the creature; and in that aspect of the word the gulf can never be lessened nor bridged between us and Him. But it also is the expression for the moral purity and perfection of that divine nature which separates Him from the creatures far more really than do the metaphysical attributes that belong to His infinitude and eternity; and in that aspect the great hope that is given to us is that we may rise nearer and nearer to that perfect whiteness of purity, and though we cannot share in His essential, changeless being, may '*walk*'—as befits our limited and changeful natures—'in the light, as He'—as befits His boundless and eternal being—'*is* in the light.' That is the only end which it is worthy of a man, being what he is, to propose to himself as the issue of his earthly experience. If I fail in that, whatever else I have accomplished, I fail in everything. I may have made myself rich, cultured, learned, famous, refined, prosperous; but if I have not at least begun to be like God in purity, in will, in heart, then my whole career has missed the purpose for which I was made, and for which all the discipline of life has been lavished

upon me. Fail there, and, wherever you succeed, you are a failure. Succeed there, and, wherever you fail, you are a success.

That great and only worthy end may be reached by the ministration of circumstances and the discipline through which God passes us. These are not the only ways by which He makes us partakers of His holiness, as we well know. There is the work of that Divine Spirit who is granted to every believer to breathe into him the holy breath of an immortal and incorruptible life. To work along with these there is the influence that is brought to bear upon us by the circumstances in which we are placed and the duties which we have to perform. These may all help us to be nearer and liker to God.

That is the intention of our sorrows. They will wean us; they will refine us; and they will blow us to His breast, as a strong wind might sweep a man into some refuge from itself. I am sure that among my hearers there are some who can thankfully attest that they were brought nearer to God by some short, sharp sorrow than by many long days of prosperity. What Absalom, in his wayward, impulsive way, did with Joab is like what God sometimes does with His sons. Joab would not come to Absalom's palace, so Absalom set his corn on fire; and then Joab came. So God sometimes burns our harvests that we may go to Him.

But the sorrow that is meant to bring us nearer to Him may be in vain. The same circumstances may produce opposite effects. I dare say there are people listening to me now who have been made hard, and sullen, and bitter, and paralysed for good work, because they have some heavy burden or some wound that life can never heal, to be carried or to ache. Ah,

brethren! we are often like shipwrecked crews, of whom some are driven by the danger to their knees, and some are driven to the spirit-casks. Take care that you do not waste your sorrows; that you do not let the precious gifts of disappointment, pain, loss, loneliness, ill-health, or similar afflictions that come into your daily life, mar you instead of mending you. See that they send you nearer to God, and not that they drive you farther from Him. See that they make you more anxious to have the durable riches and righteousness which no man can take from you, than to grasp at what may yet remain of fleeting earthly joys.

So, brethren, let us try to school ourselves into the habitual and operative conviction that life is discipline. Let us yield ourselves to the loving will of the unerring Father, the perfect love. Let us beware of getting no good from what is charged to the brim with good. And let us see to it that out of the many fleeting circumstances of life we gather and keep the eternal fruit of being partakers of His holiness. May it never have to be said of any of us that we wasted the mercies which were judgments too, and found no good in the things that our tortured hearts felt to be also evils, lest God should have to wail over any of us, 'In vain have I smitten your children; they have received no correction!'

ESAU'S VAIN TEARS

'For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.'—HEB. xii. 17.

THESE words have been often understood as teaching a very ghastly and terrible doctrine, viz., that a man

may earnestly and tearfully desire to repent, and be unable to do so. Such teaching has burdened many a heart, and has put obstacles before many feeble feet in the way of a return to God. It seems to me to be contradicted by a thousand places of Scripture, and to involve something very much like a contradiction in terms.

The Revised Version, by a very slight change, has dispelled that ugly dream. It has put the clause 'for he found no place of repentance' in a parenthesis. The effect of that is to bring the first and last clauses of the verse more closely together; and to show more clearly that what Esau is represented as seeking, and seeking with tears in vain, is not repentance, but the Father's blessing.

It may not, perhaps, be legitimate, regard being had to the construction of the sentence, to treat the clause in question as a parenthesis, because it is so closely connected with the succeeding clause by the antithesis of 'found' in the one and 'sought' in the other. But although that may be so, I have no doubt whatever that the truth intended to be conveyed by the parenthesis of the Revised Version is the true interpretation of the words before us; and that we are to find here simply the declaration that this man, at a given time of his life, 'would have inherited the blessing,' 'sought it carefully with tears,' and found it not.

Now the words, thus understood, teach a sufficiently grave and solemn lesson, though they do not teach the ghastly, and, as I believe, the erroneous thought that has been drawn from them. And it may be worth our while to consider for a moment the lessons that they do teach, and to try to lay them upon our hearts.

I. I begin then, first, with asking you to look at the

history which is held up before us here as a solemn warning.

The character of Esau is a very simple one. In many respects he is much more attractive and admirable than his brother Jacob. He is frank, generous, quick to kindle into anger, but, as the story shows us too, quick to forgive; placable, easily to be entreated; with the wild Arab virtues of chivalry and generosity and bravery; and the vices belonging to such a character, of almost utter incapacity to rise beyond the present, and of a great susceptibility to mere material and sensual gratification.

And so he comes in from the field hungry and faint. The pottage smells savoury there, as it smokes in the dish before him. The birthright is a long way off, very unsubstantial, very ideal, and the thing that is nearest him, though it be small, shuts out from his view the far greater thing that lies beyond. Therefore he elects to secure present gratification of a material character, whatever becomes of future satisfaction of a higher and more spiritual nature.

And are you going to throw stones at him for that? Is it such a very unusual thing to find men choosing paths that will yield some modicum of sufficiently hot and sufficiently savoury pottage, whatever becomes of their birthright? Is there nobody here that believes more in wealth than in purity? Is there no young man here who would rather live to make a fortune than to cultivate his own nature into loftiest beauty? Are there none of you that despise the priceless things, the things that have no price in the market because they are beyond all its wealth to purchase? Are there none of us who are such fools that a spoonful of pottage to-day seems to us to be

more real and more precious than a whole heaven hereafter?

Esau had a show of reason. He said: 'I am ready to die, and what will my birthright do for me?' Better a thousand times that he, or we, should die as animals that we may live as the sons of God, than that we should buy existence at the price of true life. And so the man of our text is sufficiently like the rest of you, for you to have a fellow feeling to him that should make you wondrous kind, and his faults are nothing at all extraordinary, but only putting in graphic form, and in such disproportion as to be almost absurd, the choice that the mass of men always make between present and future, between the material and the spiritual. And then the story goes on to tell us that, long years afterwards, we do not know how long, he found out what a fool he had been. Perhaps so much as thirty or forty years elapsed between the moment when he despised his birthright and the other moment that is set before us here. What are the points that come out in the narrative to which our text refers? 'When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father' . . . and again, 'Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.' These are the parts of the history which the writer of the Hebrews recalls to his Jewish hearers. There is nothing in them about Esau's vainly seeking for repentance, but there is an account of his passionate weeping and loud entreaties that he yet might obtain a blessing from Isaac's trembling lips. In the story there is no word of his vainly trying to repent, but there is a real

repentance in the sense in which alone that word can be employed, in reference to such an incident and upon that plane of things, viz., there is in him a decided and fundamental change of view, of mind, as to the value of the birthright that he had despised, and that is repentance; and there is bitter sorrow for what had passed, and that is repentance; and there is earnest desire that it might be different, and that is a sign of repentance. There is no sign of sorrow for sin, of repentance, in that sense of the word, but if we take the word not in the religious meaning, but in what may be called its secular significance, there are in Esau's case, as recorded in Genesis, both the elements of a decided alteration of mind and purpose, and of penitence and sorrow for the past.

These, then, are the facts of the story, and these are the facts to which my text appeals, for it begins by saying, as to those to whom the whole narrative was familiar: 'Ye know how that.' Therefore all that follows must find its vindication in the story as it is written in Genesis.

II. These, then, being the facts, let me now come, in the second place, to deal with the lesson which this story teaches us.

Remember what I have said as to points which come out in the narrative, that the man there seeks with tears for the blessing, that so far from vainly seeking to repent, in the lower sense of the word which alone is appropriate in the present case, he does repent. Therefore that expression of our text 'he found no place of repentance' does not mean 'he found no place where he could repent,' but it means he found no field on which such repentance as he had could operate—so as to undo that which was past. His repentance did not

alter the fixed destination of the blessing. His repentance, his change of mind as to the worth of the thing thrown away, and as to his own conduct in despising it, did not bring the thing back again to him. His tears did not obliterate what was done. He wished that it had been otherwise, but his wishes were vain.

And that is the lesson, my brethren, which this text as it stands is intended to teach us. We are pointed back to that tragic picture of Esau there, weeping, wringing his hands in the wild passion of his uncultured nature, when the blessing, seen to be desirable too late, had vanished from his convulsive grasp. And the lesson that is taught us is just this old solemn one. There may come in your life a time when the scales will fall from your eyes, and you will see how insignificant and miserable are the present gratifications for which you have sold your birthright, and may wish the bargain undone which cannot be undone. You cannot wash out bitter memories, you cannot blot out habits by a wish. Tears will not alter the irrevocable, you cannot avert consequences that fall upon a man, the consequences of a lifetime, by any weeping and wringing of your hands, and by any wish that they might disappear. 'What I have written I have written,' said Pilate, and in tragic sense it is true about many a man who at the end looks back upon many 'a line which dying he would wish to blot,' but which stands ineffaceable, not to be scratched out by any of your penknives, unless you can cut out the substance of the soul on which it is written.

My brother! learn the lesson. You young men and women, do you begin right, that there may not be in your career deeds or a set of the life which one day

you may wake to see has been all madness and misery! Oh! it is an awful thing for men to stand looking back upon a past life which to them appears as the vale of Sodom, on the morning after the eruption, did to Abraham as he looked on it from Mamre, 'and lo! the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.' So foul with slime-pits of boiling bitumen, the indulged lusts of the flesh, and dark with curling smoke-wreaths which tell of infernal fires wasting the fields that might have waved fruitful with harvests, the dark remembrances and blighting habits of sin set on fire of hell, does many a man's life lie spread out to his gaze. How fain would he cancel the record, if he could! How fain would he forget and reverse the history! How fain would he bring back his early innocence of these lusts and crimes! In vain! in vain!

The past stands—'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' I know, thank God for the knowledge, I know that—as we shall have to say presently—any man, at any moment of his earthly career, may find, if he seeks for it, the mercy of the Lord which bringeth salvation, but I know too that the salvation which comes to a man who has all his life been giving himself up to earth, and limiting his views and moulding his character by the present and its contemptible objects, will not be as large, as full, as blessed in many an aspect, as the salvation which might have been his if at an early stage in his life, with his character still to mould, and his memory still unwritten with evil, he had turned himself to his God, and found peace in the blood of Jesus Christ. Maimed and marred in a thousand ways, having memories which burn and sting, having habits which it will be hard to fight

against; with the marks of the gyves upon his wrists; and his eyes unaccustomed to the daylight, like the prisoner that came out of the Bastille after a lifetime of imprisonment there, and wanted to go back again because he could not bear freedom and sunshine; so many a man brought to God and saved yet so as by fire, near the end of his days, has to feel that it is not all the same whether a lifetime has been spent in the temple and priestly service, or in the foul haunts of vice and debauchery.

We shall always have as much of God as we can hold, and as much of salvation as we desire; but the tragical thing is that a life spent in living, Esau-like, for the world and for the present, lames our desires and limits our capacities, so that even if such a man afterwards become a Christian, it may be impossible even for the giving God to give us as large a bestowment of His mercy and grace as we might otherwise have possessed.

On the other side it is not to be forgotten 'the publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before you,' Pharisees and Sadducees. And there is such a thing as the deep repentance and the passionate trust with which a soul, all spattered and befouled with fleshly sins, may cleave to the Master that may overcome even these disabilities of which I have spoken. But in the main it remains true that even if Esau at the last gets a blessing, he bears away a less blessing than he might have done had his earlier life been different.

III. And now let me turn last of all to what I venture to consider the misapprehension which these words do not teach.

They do not teach that a man may desire to repent

with tears and be unable to do so. That, it seems to me, is to assert a staring, stark contradiction, for if a man desire to repent he must have changed his views as to the conduct of which he desires to repent, and that change of view is the repentance which he desires. And if a man desires to repent there must be in him some measure of regret and sorrow for the conduct of which he desires to repent, considered as sin against God, and that is repentance.

Nor do the words teach, as it seems to me, the cognate thought which has sometimes been deduced from them, that a man may desire to receive the salvation of His soul from God, and may not receive it. To desire is to possess; to possess in the measure of the desire, and according to its reality. There is no such thing in the spiritual realm as a real longing unfulfilled. 'Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.' And the awful pictures that have been drawn of men weeping because they could not repent, and of men with passionate tears imploring from the Father in heaven the blessing which does not come to them, are slanders upon God and misapprehensions of His gospel. That gospel proclaims that wheresoever and whosoever will ask shall receive, or rather that God has already given, and that nothing but obstinate determination not to possess prevents any man from being enriched with the fulness of God's salvation.

Only remember, dear brethren, it is possible for a man to wish vagrantly, with half his will, to wish in a languid fashion, to wish while he is not prepared to surrender what stands in the way of his wish being gratified. And such wishing as that never got salvation, and never will. There are plenty of people that

would like to be saved as they understand it, and to be sure that they are so, who are not prepared to close with the terms of salvation. It is not wishing of that sort that I am talking about. Heaven may be had for the wishing, but it must be an honest wish, it must be out-and-out wishing, it must be wishing which actuates the life, it must be wishing which drives you to the Cross of Christ. And then, in the measure of the desire shall be the gift; and the larger the petition, the larger the benediction which comes fluttering down from heaven on to your head and into your heart.

We have all sold our birthright, but we have a Brother in whom we may win it back, the elder Brother of us prodigals, who, instead of grudging us the fatted calf and the festival welcome, Himself has died that they may be ours; and that no penitence may be unavailing, nor any longing be unsatisfied for ever more.

Whatever we are, whatever has been our past, however embruted in sensual vice, however entangled in material gains, we have but to turn ourselves to that gracious Lord our Brother, in whom the Father blesses us with all heavenly blessings, and we shall share in the birthright of His firstborn Son, 'being heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.'

WITH WHOM FAITH LIVES

'Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.'—HEB. xii. 22, 23.

THE magnificent passage of which these words are part sums up the contrast between Judaism and Christianity which this whole Epistle has been illus-

trating and enforcing. The writer takes the scene on Sinai as expressive of the genius of the former revelation, whose centre was a law which evoked the consciousness of sin, and kindled terror; and which was embodied in sensible and material symbols. Far other and better are the characteristics of the latter revelation. That excites no dread; is given from no flashing mountain with accompaniments of darkness and trumpet blasts and terrible words; and it brings us into contact with no mere material and therefore perishable symbols, but with realities none the less real because they are above sense, and not remote from us though they be.

For, says my text, 'Ye *are* come,' not 'Ye *shall* come.' The humblest life may be in touch with the grandest realities in the universe, and need not wait for death to draw aside the separating curtain in order to be in the presence of God and in the heavenly Jerusalem.

How are these things brought to us? By the revelation of God in Christ. How are we brought to them? By faith in that revelation. So every believing life, howsoever encompassed by flesh and sense, can thrust, as it were, a hand through the veil, and grasp the realities beyond. The scene described in the first words of my text may verily be the platform on which our lives are lived, howsoever in outward form they may be passed on this low earth; and the companions, which the second part of our text discloses, may verily be our companions, though we 'wander lonely as a cloud,' or seem to be surrounded by far less noble society. By faith we are come to the unseen realities which are come to us by the revelation of God in Christ. 'Ye *are* come unto Mount Zion.'

Now, looking generally at these words, they give us just two things—the scene and the companions of the Christian life. The remainder of the passage will occupy us on future occasions, but for the present I confine myself to the words which I have read. And I shall best deal with them, I think, if I simply follow that division into which they naturally fall, and ask you to note, first, where faith lives, and, second, with whom faith lives.

I. First, then, where faith lives.

'Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' There are two points here which carry us back to the topography of the ancient sacred city. In the literal Jerusalem, Zion was the lofty Acropolis, at once fortress and site of the king's palace, and round it clustered the dwellings of the city.

The two symbols are thus closely connected, and present substantially the same idea, and perhaps it is pressing a figure too far to find a diversity of meaning in the separate parts of this closely connected whole. But still it seems to me that there is a substantial difference of aspect in the two clauses.

The first thought, therefore, that I would suggest to you is this, that the life of a man who has truly laid hold of Jesus Christ, and so is living by faith, is on its inward side—that is, in deepest reality—a life passed in the dwelling of the great King. All through this letter, the writer is recurring to the thought of access to God, unimpeded and continual, as being the great gift which Jesus Christ has brought to us. And here he gathers it into the noblest symbol. There, lifted high above all the humbler roofs, flash the golden pinnacles of the great palace in which God Himself

dwells. And we, toiling and moiling down here, surrounded by squalid circumstances, and annoyed by many cares, and limited by many narrownesses which we often find to be painful, and fighting with many sorrows, and seeming to ourselves to be, sometimes, homeless wanderers in a wilderness, may yet ever more 'dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to inquire in His temple.'

The privilege has for its other side a duty; the duty has for its foundation a privilege. For if it be true that the real life of every believing soul is a life that never moves from the temple-palace where God is, and that its inmost secret and the spring of its vitality is communion with God, what shall we say of the sort of lives that most of us most often live? Is there any truth in such exalted metaphors as this in reference to us? Does it not sound far liker irony than truth to say of people whose days are so shuttle-cocked about by trifling cares, and absorbed in fleeting objects, and wasted in the chase after perishable delights, that they 'are come unto Mount Zion,' and dwell in the presence of God? Is my 'life hid with Christ in God'? There is no possibility of Death being your usher, to introduce you into the house of God not made with hands, unless faith has introduced you into it even whilst you tarry here, and unless your habitual direction of heart and mind towards Him keeps you ever more at least a waiter at His threshold, if you do not pass beyond. 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

My brother! do we so knit ourselves to Him, by heartfelt acceptance of the good news of His loving proximity to us which Jesus Christ brings, as that

indeed we have left earth and care and sin at the foot of the mount, with the asses and the servants, and have our faces set to the lofty sweetnesses of our 'Father's house'? 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house,' and no less blessed are they 'in whose hearts are the ways' that lead to it.

Then let me remind you how Zion contrasts with Sinai, and thus suggests the thought that a true Christian life, based upon faith, has a communion with God which is darkened by no dread, nor disturbed by consciousness of unforgiven sin. We have set against each other the terrors of that theophany on Mount Sinai, attendant on, or rather precedent to, the giving of the law—the mountain wrapped in smoke; in the heart of the wreathing blackness the flashing fire; from out of the midst of it the long-drawn trumpet blasts, the proclamation of the coming of the King; and then the voice which, divine as it was, froze the marrow of the hearers' bones, that they entreated that no words like these should any more fall on their trembling ears.

That is the one picture. The other shows us the mount where the King dwells, serene and peaceful, the clouds far below the horizon; the flashing fire changed into lambent light; the blast of the trumpet stilled; the dread voice changed into a voice 'that speaketh better things' than were heard amidst the granite cliffs of the wilderness.

And so in vivid, picturesque form the writer gathers up the one great contrast between the revelation of which the message was law and its highest result the consciousness of sin and the shrinking that ensued, and the other of which the inmost heart is love, and the issue the attraction of hearts by the magnetism

of its grace. The old fable of a mountain of loadstone which drew ships at sea to its cliffs is true of this Mount Zion, which is exalted above the mountains that it may draw hearts tossing on the restless sea of life to the 'fair havens' beneath its sheltering height. There is no dread, though there is reverence, and no fear, though there is awe, in the approach of those who come through Jesus Christ, and live beneath the smile of their reconciled God and Father. 'Ye are come unto Mount Zion,' the dwelling-place of the living God, from whose lips there will steal into the ears and the hearts of those who keep near Him, gracious words of consolation, so thrilling, so soothing, so enlightening, so searching, so encouraging, that they which hear them shall say, 'Speak yet again, that I may be blessed.'

And then there is the other aspect of this scene where faith lives. 'Ye are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' I need not remind you of how much we hear in this Epistle in reference to that city. It is generally set forth as being yet to come, as being the object of seeking rather than of possession. But the fact is that there are two aspects of it. In one it is future, in the other it is present. The general idea to be attached to it is simply that of the order and social state of those who love and serve God. Here, in this part of my text, we have to deal with the city rather than with its inhabitants. They follow thereafter, but, so far as we can separate between the two, we have just this idea enforced in the words that I am now commenting upon—viz., that the lowliest life, knit, as it seems to be, by so many bonds to the perishable associations and affinities of earth, yet, if it be a life of faith in

Jesus Christ, has its true affinities and relationships beyond, and not here. 'We have our citizenship in heaven,' says the Apostle, 'from whence also we look for the Saviour.' And every Christian man and woman is therefore bound to two or three very plain duties.

If you are living by faith, you do not belong to this order in the midst of which you find yourself. See that you keep vivid the consciousness that you do not. Cultivate the sense of detachment from the present, of not being absorbed by, or belonging to, things which are not coeval with yourself, and from all of which you will have to pass. Cultivate the sense of having your true home beyond the seas; and look to it as emigrants and colonists in a far-off land do to the old country, as being *home*. Live by the laws of your own city, and not by those that run in the community in which you dwell. You are under another jurisdiction. The examples, the maxims of low earthly prudence, or even of a somewhat higher earthly morality, are not your laws. You are not bound to do as the people round about you do. 'I appeal unto Cæsar.' I take my orders from him. I send my despatches home, and report to headquarters, and if I get approbation thence, it does not matter what the people amongst whom I dwell think about me. Make your investments at home. The Jews invented banking and letters of credit in order that they might the more easily shift their wealth from one land to another as exigencies required. We are strangers where we are. Do not put your property into the country in which you live as an alien, and lock it up there; but remit, as you can do, to the land where you are going, and to which you belong. Home

securities are a good deal better than foreign ones. 'Ye are come to the city of the living God.' 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.'

II. And now let me turn to the other thought here—With whom does faith live?

I need not trouble you with merely expository remarks upon the diversity of arrangements which is possible in the second half of my text. Suffice it to say that just as the scene of the life of faith has been represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form as Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem, so the companions of that life are also represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form.

A slight alteration in the punctuation and order of the words in our text brings out, as it seems to me, the writer's idea. Suppose you put a comma after 'innumerable company,' and substitute for that phrase the original Greek word, so reading 'and to *myriads*,' and then pause there. That is the general definition, on which follows the division of the 'myriads' into two parts; one of which is 'the general assembly of angels,' and the other is the 'Church of the firstborn which are written in heaven.' So then, of companions for us, in our lonely earthly life, there be two sorts, and as to both of them the condition of recognising and enjoying their society is the same—viz., the exercise of faith.

Now the word rendered 'general assembly' has a grander idea in it than that. It is the technical word employed in classic Greek for the festal meetings of a nation at their great games or other solemn occasions, and always carries in it the idea of joy as well as of society. And so here the writer would have us think of one part of that great city, the heavenly Jerusalem,

as, if I may so say, the dwelling-place of a loftier race of creatures whose life is immortal and pure joy; and that we, even we, have some connection with them. In an earlier part of this letter we read that they are all 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation.' But here the ministration is not referred to, simply the fact of union and communion.

I am not going to enter at any length upon that subject, concerning which we know but very little. But still it seems to me that our ordinary type of Christian belief loses a great deal because it gives so little heed to the numerous teachings of the New Testament in regard to the reality of the existence of such beings, and of the tie that unites them with lowly believers here. All the servants of the King are friends of one another. And howsoever many they may be, and howsoever high above us in present stature any may tower, and howsoever impossible it be for us to see the glancing and hear the winnowing of their silver wings, as they flash upon errands of obedience to Him, and rejoice to hearken to the voice of His word, there is joy in the true belief that the else waste places of the universe are filled with those who, in their loftiness, rejoice to bend to us, saying, 'I am thy fellow servant, and of them which worship God.'

Brethren, we have a better face brightening the unseen than any angel face. But just because Jesus Christ fills the unseen for us, in Him we are united to all those of whom He is the Lord, and He is Lord of men as well as angels. So if the eyes of our hearts are opened, we, too, may see 'the mountain full of chariots of fire and horses of fire round about' the

believing soul. And we, too, may come to the joyful assembly of the angels, whose joy is all the more poignant and deep when they, the elder brethren, see the prodigals return.

But the second group of companions is probably the more important for us. 'Ye are come,' says the text, not only to the angelic beings that cluster round His throne in joyful harmony, but also 'to the Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.' And, seeing that the names are in heaven, that means, evidently, men who themselves are here upon earth.

I have not time to dwell upon the great ideas which are here contained in the designation of the community of believing souls; I only remind you that probably the word 'church' is not so much employed here in its distinct ecclesiastical sense (for there are no ecclesiastical phrases in the Epistle to the Hebrews), as with allusion to the assembly of the Israelites beneath Mount Sinai, the contrast with which colours the whole of the context. It means, therefore, in general, simply the assembly of the firstborn. Can there be more than one firstborn in a family? Yes! In this family there can, for it is a name here not pointing to a temporary order, but to dignity and prerogative. The firstborn had the right of inheritance; the firstborn was sanctified to the Lord; the firstborn, by his primogeniture, was destined in the old system to be priest and king. All Israel collectively was regarded as the firstborn of the Lord. We, if our hearts are knit to Him who is pre-eminently firstborn amongst many brethren, obtain, by virtue of our union with Him, the rights and privileges, the obligations and responsibilities, of the

eldest sons of the family of God. We inherit; we ought to be sanctified. It is for us, as the 'first fruits of His creatures,' to bring other men to Him, that through the Church the world may reach its goal, and creation may become that which God intended it to be.

These firstborn have their names written in heaven —inscribed on the register of the great city. And to that great community, invisible like the other realities in my text, and not conterminous with any visible society such as the existing visible Church, all those belong and come who are knit together by faith in the one Lord.

So, dear friends, it is for us to realise, in the midst, perhaps, of loneliness, the tie that knits us to every heart that finds in Jesus Christ what we do. In times when we seem to stand in a minority; in times when we are tormented by uncongenial surroundings; when we are tempted by lower society; when we are disposed to say, 'I am alone, with none to lean upon,' it does us good to think that, not only are there angels in heaven who may have charge concerning us, but that, all over the world, there are scattered brethren whose existence is a comfort, though we have never clasped their hands.

Such, then, is the scene, and such is the society, in which we may all dwell. Christian men and women, do you make conscience of realising all this by faith, by contemplation, by direct endeavours to pierce beyond the surface and shows of things to the realities that are unseen? See to it that you avail yourself of all the power, the peace, the blessing which will be yours in the degree in which your faith makes these the home and companions of your lives.

How noble the lowest life may become, like some

poor, rough sea-shell with a gnarled and dimly coloured exterior, tossed about in the surge of a stormy sea, or anchored to a rock, but when opened all iridescent with rainbow sheen within, and bearing a pearl of great price! So, to outward seeming, my life may be rough and solitary and inconspicuous and sad, but, in inner reality, it may have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and have angels for its guardians, and all the firstborn for its brethren and companions.

FAITH'S ACCESS TO THE JUDGE, AND HIS ATTENDANTS

'Ye are come . . . to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.'—HEB. xii. 23.

THE principle of arrangement in this grand section of this letter is obscure, and I am afraid that I cannot cast much, if any, light upon it. We might, at first sight, have expected that the two clauses of our present text should have been inverted, so as to bring all the constituent parts of 'the city of the living God' closely together—viz., 'the angels,' the members of the militant Church on earth, and those of the triumphant Church in heaven; and also to bring together 'God the Judge of all,' and 'Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant.' But the arrangement, as it stands in our text, may be compared profitably with that of the preceding verses, which we were considering in the last sermon. There, as here, the allusion to the immediate presence of God passed at once into the reference to the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. And just as there Zion, the palace, was immediately connected with the city of

the living God, so here the writer, harking back, as it were, to his original starting-point, no sooner names 'God the Judge' than he passes on to set before us 'the spirits of just men made perfect.' In the earlier clauses we have had the more general reference to the palace and the city around it. Here, if I may so say, we pass within the palace gates, and the writer tells us what we find there. This interweaving of the presence of God with that of the creatures that live in His love witnesses to the great truth that our God dwells in no isolated supremacy, but in the midst of a blessed society; and that the solitary souls who find their way into His presence have a welcome, not only from Him, but from all their brethren of His great family.

So the arrangement may not be so inexplicable as, at first sight, it strikes us as being, if it suggests to us the close and indissoluble connection between God Himself and all those who, in every place, whether the place above or the place beneath, call upon the name of Him who is both their God and ours. In dealing with these words, I have simply to consider these two ideas thus set before us.

I. Faith plants us at the very bar of God.

'Ye are come to God the Judge of all.' Now, it is to be observed that, more accurately, the words might be rendered, 'Ye are come to the God of all as Judge'; for the point which the writer wishes to bring out is not so much the general idea of the divine presence, as that presence considered under a specific aspect, and referring to one mode of His action—viz., the judicial. It is further to be noticed that the judgment which is here spoken about is not, as the very language, 'Ye *are* come to the Judge,'

implies, future, but present. The Old Testament, with continual reference to which this letter is saturated, has a great deal more to say about the present continuous judgment which God works all through the ages than about the final future judgment. And, in accordance, not only with the language of our text, which makes *coming* a present thing, but, in accordance also with the whole tone of the Old Testament, we should recognise here, not so much a reference to the final tribunal before which all mankind must stand (at which the Judge is characteristically represented in the New Testament as being, not God the Father, but Jesus Christ), as to the continual judgment, both in the sense of decision as to character and infliction of consequences, which is being exercised *now* by the God of all.

So, then, the first thought that I would suggest from this idea is, Here is a truth which it is the office of faith to realise continually in our daily lives. Your loving access to God, Christian men and women, has brought you right under the eye of the Judge, and, though there be no terror in our approach to that tribunal, there ought to be a wholesome awe as the permanent attitude of our spirits, the awe which is the very opposite of the cowering dread which hath torment. He would be a bold criminal who would commit crimes in the very judgment-hall and before the face of his judge. And that must be a very defective Christian faith which, like the so-called faith of many amongst us, goes through life and sins in entire oblivion of the fact that it stands in the very presence of the Judge of all the earth. Oh, if we could rend the veil as death will rend it, and see the things which are, as faith will help us to see them

—for it *thins*, if it does not tear, the envious curtain between—would it be possible that we should live the low, mean, selfish, earthly, sinful lives, devoured by anxieties, defaced by stains, depressed by trivial sorrows, which, alas! so many of us do live? 'Ye are come . . . unto God the Judge of all.' 'If ye call Him Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'

Then, again, notice that this judgment of God is one which a Christian man should joyfully accept. 'The Lord will judge His people,' says one of the psalms. 'You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities,' says one of the prophets. Such sayings represent this present judgment as inevitable, just because of the close connection into which true faith brings a man with his Father in heaven. Inevitable, and likewise most blessed and desirable, for in the thought are included all the methods by which, in providence, and by ministration of His truth and of His Spirit, God reveals to us our hidden meannesses; and delivers us sometimes, even by the consequences which accrue from them, from the burden and power of our sin.

So, then, the office of faith in regard to this continuous judgment which God is exercising upon us because He loves us is, first of all, to open our hearts to it by confession, by frank communion, by referring all our actions to Him to court that investigation. That judgment is no mere knowledge by cold omniscience, such as a heathen conception of the divine eye might make it to be; but just as a careful gardener will go over his rose-trees, and the more

carefully the more precious they are in his sight, to pick from each nestling-place at the junction of the leaves with the stem the tiny insects that are sucking out the sap and destroying them, so God will search our hearts in order to pluck from these the crawling evils which, microscopic and tiny as they may be, will yet, in their multitude innumerable, be destructive of our spirits' lives.

It is a *gospel* when we say, 'The Lord will judge His people.' Therefore in many a psalm we have the writers spreading themselves out before God, and beseeching Him to come and search them, and try them, and sift them through His sieve, and know them altogether, in the sure confidence that wheresoever He beholds an evil He will be ready to cure it, and that whosoever spreadeth out his sin before God will be lightened of the burden of his sin.

This merciful judgment, which is, in fact, all directed to the perfecting and sanctifying of its subjects, reaches its end in the measure in which we register its decisions in our consciences. God writes His mind about us on them, and when they speak they are only speaking an echo of the sentence that has been pronounced from that loftier tribunal. Therefore, whosoever professeth himself to be a Christian and does anything, be it great or small, which his conscience rebukes when done, and prohibited before it was done, that man is despising the judgment of God, and bringing down upon himself the condemnation which follows despised judgment. 'If we should judge ourselves we should not be judged.' Reverence your consciences: they are the echo of the Judge's voice; peruse their records; they are the register of the Judge's sentence; and when-

soever that inward voice speaks, bow before it and say, 'Lord! Thy servant heareth.'

And then, further, remember that this judgment is one that demands our thankful acceptance of the discipline which it puts in force. If we knew ourselves we should bless God for our sorrows. These are His special means of drawing His children away from their evil. 'When we are chastened, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.' Oh! there would be less impatience, less blank amazement when suffering comes to us, less vain and impotent regrets for vanished blessings, if we saw in all the dealings of our Father's hands the results of His judgment, and believed that it is better for us to be separated, though it be with violence and much bleeding of torn-away hearts, from our idols than that our idolatry should destroy us and mar them. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' This judgment is not only the merciful separation of us from our sins, but it is also a judgment on our behalf.

The office of the early Jewish judges was not only the judicial one which we mean by the word, but was much wider, and some trace of that wider idea runs through almost all the Old Testament references to the divine judgment. It comes to mean, not merely a decision adverse or favourable, as the case may be, as to the moral character of its subjects, but it also substantially means pleading their cause, defending their right, intervening for them, and so in many a psalm you will find such petitions as this, 'Judge me, O Lord; for I am poor and needy. Plead my cause against them which rise up against me.' And the same conception of the Judge's office appears in one of our Lord's parables, familiar to us all, in which we

are told that 'the Lord will judge His own elect, though He bear long with them.'

Thus, another of the blessed thoughts that come out of this conception of our approach to 'the Judge of all' is that we may confidently commit our cause to Him, and leave our vindication in His hands. So, abstinence from self-assertion, from self-vindication, from vengeance or recompense, patience, courage, consolation, strength, all these virtues will be ours if we understand to whom we come by our faith, and can behold, on the throne of the universe, One who will plead our cause, and undertake for us whensoever we are burdened and oppressed.

II. Secondly, Faith carries us while living to the society of the living dead.

'The Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect.' Immediately on the thought of God arising in the writer's mind, there rises also the blessed thought of the blessed company in the centre of whom He lives and reigns. We can say little about that subject, and perhaps the less we say the more we shall understand, and the more deeply we shall feel. We get glimpses but no clear vision, as when a flock of birds turn in their rapid flight, and for a moment the sun glances on their white wings; and then, with another turn, they drift away, spots of blackness in the blue. So we see but for a moment as the light falls, and then lose the momentary glory, but we may at least reverently note the exalted words here.

'The spirits of . . . men made perfect.' That is to say, they dwell freed from the incubus and limitations, and absolved from the activities, of a bodily organisation. We cannot understand such a condition. To us

it may seem to mean passivity or almost unconsciousness, but we know, as another New Testament writer has told us, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and that in some deep, and to us now undiscoverable, fashion, that which the corporeal frame does for men here, immersed in the material world, there the encircling Christ in whom they rest does for them. We know little more, but we have a glimpse of a land of deep peace in which repose is not passivity nor unconsciousness, any more than service is weariness. And there we have to leave it, knowing only this, that it is possible for a man to exist and to be, in a relative sense, perfected without a body.

Then, further, these spirits are 'perfect.'

The writer has said, at the close of the preceding chapter, that the ancient saints 'without us should not be made perfect.' And here he employs the same word with distant reference, as I suppose, to his previous declaration. From which I infer that that old thought is true, that Jesus Christ shot some rays of His victorious and all-reconciling power from His Cross into the regions of darkness, and brought thence those who had been waiting for His coming through many a long age. A great painter has left on the walls of a little cell in his Florentine convent a picture of the victorious Christ, white-robed and banner-bearing, breaking down the iron gates that shut in the dark, rocky cave; and flocking to Him, with outstretched hands of eager welcome, the whole long series from the first man downwards, hastening to rejoice in His light, and to participate in His redemption.

So the ancient Church was 'perfected' in Christ; but the words refer, not only to those Old Testament patriarchs and saints, but to all who, up to the time

of the writer's composition of his letter, 'slept in Jesus.' They have reached their goal in Him. The end for which they were created has been attained. They are in the summer of their powers, and full-grown adults, whilst we here, the maturest and the wisest, the strongest and the holiest, are but as babes in Christ.

But yet that 'perfecting' does not exclude progress, continuous through all the ages; and especially it does not exclude one great step in advance which, as Scripture teaches us, will be taken when the resurrection of the body is granted. Corporeity is the perfecting humanity. Body, soul, and spirit, these make the full-summed man in all his powers. And so the souls beneath the altar, clothed in white, and rapt in felicity, do yet wait 'for the adoption, even the redemption of the body.'

Mark, further, that these spirits perfected would not have been perfected there unless they had been made just here. That is the first step, without which nothing in death has any tendency to ennoble or exalt men. If we are ever to come to the perfecting of the heavens, we must begin with the justifying that takes place on earth.

Let me point you to one other consideration, bearing not so much on the condition as on the place of these perfected spirits. It is very significant, as I tried to point out, that they should be closely associated in our text with 'God the Judge of all.' Is there any hint there that men who have been redeemed, who being unjust, have been made just, and have had experience of restoration and of the misery of departure, shall, in the ultimate order of things, stand nearer the throne than unfallen spirits, and teach angels? It is

the 'just man made perfect,' and not the festal assembly of the angels, that are brought into connection here with 'the Judge of all.' Is there any hint that in some sense these perfected spirits are assessors of God in His great judgment? 'Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,' seems to point in that direction. But the ground is precarious, and I only point to the words in passing as possibly affording a foothold for a 'perhaps.'

But the more important consideration is the real unity between poor souls here who are knit to Jesus Christ, and the spirits of the just made perfect who stand so close to the judgment-seat.

Ah, brethren! we have to alter the meaning of the words 'present' and 'absent' when we come to speak of spiritual realities. The gross localised conceptions that are appropriate to material space, and to transitory time, have nothing to do with that higher religion. It is no mere piece of rhetoric or sentiment to say that where our treasure is, there are our hearts, and where our hearts are there are we.

Love has no localities. It knits together two between whom oceans wide roll; it knits together saints on earth and saints in heaven. To talk of place is irrelevant in reference to such a union; for if our love, our aims, our hopes be the same, we are together. And if they on the upper side, and we on the lower, grasp each the outstretched hand of the same God, then we are one in Him, and the same life will tingle through our earthly frames and through their perfected spirits. He is the centre of the great wheel whose spokes are light and blessedness; and all who stand around Him are brought into unity by their common relation to the centre.

Our sorrows would be less sorrowful, our loss less utter, if we truly believed that while apart we are still together. Our courage and our hope would rise if we came closer in loving contemplation and believing thought to the present blessedness of those once our fellow-travellers, who, weak as we, have entered into rest. Heaven itself would gain some touch of true attractiveness if we more clearly saw, and more thankfully felt, that there is 'the Judge of all,' and there also 'the spirit of just men made perfect.'

But howsoever great may be the encouragement, the consolation, the quieting that come from them, let us turn away our eyes from the surrounding and lower seats to fix them on the central throne. Let us ever realise that we are ever in our great Judge's eye. Let us spread out our hearts for His scrutiny and decision, for His discipline if need be. Let us commit to Him our cause, and, in the peace that comes therefrom, we may understand why it was that psalmists of old called upon earth to rejoice and the hills to be glad because He 'cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth.'

THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT AND ITS SEAL

'Ye are come . . . to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.'—HEB. xii. 24.

IN previous sermons on the preceding context, we have had frequent occasion to remark on the parallel and contrast between Sinai and Zion, as expressive of the difference between the genius of Judaism and

Christianity, which shapes the whole of this section. That contrast and parallel are most obvious at its beginning and here at its close.

In the beginning we had the mountain of the Law, swathed in darkness, lit by flashing flame, contrasted with the sunny slopes of Zion, palace-crowned, and the wild desert set in opposition to the city of peace that clustered round the foot of Zion's Mount. Here at the close we have the key-words of the old revelation laid hold of and applied to the new. Judaism was a covenant in the form of a law, of which the terms were these: 'Do, and thou shalt live!' The gospel is a covenant in the form of a promise, of which the tenor is 'Believe and live; live and do!' The ancient covenant had Moses for its mediator, passing between the mountain and the plain. The gospel has a better and a truer link of union between God and man than any mere man, however exalted, can be. The ancient system had its sprinkled blood, by which the men on whom it fell entered into the covenant, and were ceremonially sanctified. The new covenant has its blood. An awful voice rolled amongst the peaks of Sinai. That 'blood of sprinkling' speaks too. And then the writer blends with that allusion another, to the voice of the blood of the first martyr, every drop of which cried to God for retribution, and points to the blood of the more innocent Abel, every drop of which appeals to the Father's heart for pardon.

Now it may be said that thus to present Christian truth under the guise of the symbols of an ancient ceremonial and external system is a retrograde step. And some people, who think themselves very enlightened, tell us that the time is past for looking at

Christianity from such a point of view. One great man has let himself talk about 'Hebrew old clothes.' I am very much mistaken if these old clothes will not turn out to be something like the raiment that the Hebrews wore in the wilderness, 'which waxed not old for forty years,' and outlasted a great many suits that other people had cut for themselves. We have only to ponder upon these emblems until they become significant to us, in order to see that, instead of being antiquated and effete, they are throbbing with life, and fit as close to the needs of to-day as ever they did. They came with a special message, no doubt, to these men to whom this letter was first addressed, who were by descent and habit Hebrews, and saturated with the law. But their message is quite as much to you and me; and I desire now simply to bring out the large and permanent meanings which lie beneath them.

I. First, then, note that God's revelation to us is in the form of a covenant.

Now, of course, when we talk about a covenant or compact between two men, we mean a matter of bargaining on the terms of which both have been consulted, and which has assumed its final form after negotiations and perhaps compromise. But there are necessarily limitations to the transference of all human ideas to divine relations. One such limitation is expressed in the very language of the original. The word rendered 'covenant' suppresses the idea of conjunction, and emphasises that of appointment. By which we are to learn that the covenant which God makes with man is of His own settling and is not the result of mutual giving and taking; that men have nothing to do with the determining of these conditions;

that He Himself has made them, and that He is bound by them, not because we have arranged them with Him, but because He has announced them to us. With that limitation we can take the idea and apply it to the relation between God and us, established in the great message of the gospel.

For what is the notion that underlies the old-fashioned, and to some of you obsolete and unwelcome word? Why, simply this, it is a definite disclosure of God's purpose as affecting you and me, by which disclosure He is prepared to stand and to be bound. It is a revelation, but a revelation that obliges the Revealer to a certain course of conduct; or, if you would rather have a less theological word, it is a system of promise under which God mercifully has willed that we should live. And just as when a king gives forth a proclamation, he is bound by the fact that he gave it forth, so God, out of all the infinite possibilities of His action, condescends to tell us what His line is to be, and He will adhere to it. He lets us see the works of the clock, if I may so say, not wholly, but in so far as we are affected by His action.

What, then, are the terms of this covenant? We have them drawn out, first, in the words of Jeremiah, who apprehended, when he was dwelling in the midst of that eternal system, that it could not be a final system; and next, by the writer of this letter quoting the prophet, who, in the midst of the vanishing of that which could be shaken, saw emerging, like the fairy form of the fabled goddess out of the sea-foam, the vast and permanent outlines of a nobler system. The promises of the covenant are, then, full forgiveness as the foundation of all, and built upon that, a knowledge of God inwardly illuminating and making

a man independent of external helps, though he may sometimes be grateful for them; then a mutual possession which is based upon these, whereby I, even I, can venture to say, God is mine, and, more wonderful still, I, even I, can venture to believe that He bends down from heaven and says: 'And thou, thou art Mine!' and then, as the result of all—named first, but coming last in the order of nature—the law of His commandment will be so written upon the heart that delight and duty are spelt with the same letters, and His will is our will. These are the elements, or you can gather them all up into one, namely, the promise of eternal *life*—based upon forgiveness, operating through the knowledge of God, and issuing in perfect conformity to His blessed will.

If these, then, be the articles of the paction, think for a moment of the blessedness that lies hived in this ancient, and to some of us musty, thought of a covenant of God's. It gives a basis for knowledge. Unless He audibly and articulately and verifiably utters His mind and will, I know not where men are to go to get it. Without an actual revelation from heaven, of other nature, of clearer contents, of more solid certitude than the revelations that may have been written upon the tablets of our hearts, over which we have too often scrawled the devil's message, and over and above the ambiguous articles that may be picked out and pieced together, from reflection upon providence and nature, we need something better and firmer, more comprehensively and more manifestly authoritative, before we are entitled to say, 'Behold! I *know* that God loves me, and that I may put my trust in Him.' Brethren! I for my part believe that between agnosticism on that side, and the full

evangelical faith of the New Testament in a supernatural revelation on this side, all forms of so-called Christianity which shy at the idea of a supernatural revelation are destined to have the life squeezed out of them, and that what will be left will be the two logical positions; first, God, if there be a God, never spoke, and we do not know anything about Him; and, second, 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.' If there be a God at all, and if there be in Him any love and any righteousness, it is infinitely more reasonable to suppose that He should have spoken His mind and heart to men, and given them a covenant on which they can reckon, than that He has been from the beginning a dumb God, that never opened His mouth with a word of guidance or of sympathy for the sons of men. Believe that who may; I cannot believe in a pure theism, which has no place for a supernatural revelation.

And then, again, let me remind you how here is the one foothold, if I may so say, for confidence. If God hath not spoken there is nothing to reckon upon. There are perhapses, probabilities if you like, possibilities, but nothing beyond, and no man can build a faith on a peradventure. There must be solid ground on which to rest; and here is solid ground: 'I make a covenant with you.' 'God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent.' And armed with that great thought that He has verily rent the darkness and spoken words which commit *Him* and assure *us*, we, even the weakest of us, may venture to go to Him, and plead with Him that He cannot and dare not alter the

thing that has gone forth out of His mouth; and so, in deepest reverence, can approach Him and plead the necessity of a great *Must* under which He has placed Himself by His own word. God is faithful, the covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God.

II. Secondly, mark that Jesus Christ is the Executor of this covenant.

Moses, of course, was a go-between, in a mere external sense; from the mountain to the plain and from the plain to the mountain, he passed, and in either case simply carried a message bearing God's will to man or man's submission to God. But we have to dig far deeper into the idea than that of a mere outward messenger who carries what is entrusted to him, as an errand boy might, if we are to get the notion of Christ's relation to these great promises, which, massed together, are God's covenant with us. Observe that the emphasis is here laid on the manhood of the Lord. It is *Jesus* who is the 'Mediator of the covenant': and observe, too, that that idea passes into the wider notion of His place as the link uniting God and man. The depth of the thought is only reached when we recognise His divinity and His humanity. He is the ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven.

Because God dwells in Him, and the word became flesh, He is able to lay His hand upon both, and to bring God to man and man to God.

He brings God to man. If what I have been saying is at all true, that for all solid faith we must have an articulate declaration of the divine mind and heart, it seems to me to be equally irrefragable that for any such declaration of the divine heart and mind we must have a human vehicle. God speaks through

men. It is His highest way of making Himself known to men. And Jesus Christ in His Manhood declares God to us. Not by the mere words which He speaks, as a teacher and a wise man, a religious genius and a saint, a philosopher and a poet, a moralist and a judge; but by these, and also by His life, by His emotions of pity and gentleness and patience, and by everything that He does and everything that He endures, He speaks to us of God.

Brethren, where shall a poor man rest his soul outside of the direct or indirect influences of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Why! the very men who reject Him to-day, on the plea that they have learnt a nobler conception of God than they can find in Christianity, owe their conception of Him to the gospel which they reject. Where else is there certitude solid enough to resist the pressure of sorrow and of sin; confidence enough to maintain faith in the face of difficulty and conscious evil and death; or energy enough in a creed to make religion an all-controlling influence and an all-gladdening stay except in Jesus Christ? I venture to say, nowhere! Nowhere beyond the limits to which either the river of the water of life has manifestly flowed; or some rills and rivulets from it have crept underground to give strange verdure to some far-off pasture; nowhere else is there found the confidence in the Father's heart which is the property of the Christian man, and the result of the Christian covenant. Jesus Christ brings God to man by the declaration of His nature incarnate in humanity.

And, on the other hand, He brings man to God: for He stands to each of us as our true Brother, and united to us by such close and real bonds as that all

which He has been and done may be ours if we join ourselves to Him by faith. And He brings men to God, because in Him only do we find the drawings that incline wayward and wandering hearts to the Father. And He seals for us that great Covenant in His own person and work, in so far as what He in manhood has done has made it possible that such promises should be given to us. And, still further, He is the Mediator of the covenant, in so far as He Himself possesses in His humanity all the blessings which manhood is capable of deriving from the Father, and He has them all in order that He may give them all. There is the great reservoir from which all men may fill their tiny cups.

Men tell us that they want no Mediator between them and God. Ah, my brother! go down into your own hearts; try to understand what sin is; and then go up as near as you can to the dazzling white light, and try partially to conceive of what God's holiness is, and tell us, Do you think you, as you are, could walk in that light and not be consumed? It seems to me that no man who has any deep knowledge of his own heart, and any, though it be inadequate, yet true, conception of the divine nature, dare take upon his lips that boast that we often hear, 'We need none to come between us and God.'

For me, I thankfully hear Him say, 'No man cometh to the Father but by Me'; and pray for grace to tread in that only way that leadeth unto God.

III. Note the sprinkling of the blood which seals the covenant.

There is an allusion there, as I have already suggested, to the ceremonial at Sinai, when, in token of their entrance into the covenant, the blood of the

sacrifice was sprinkled upon the crowd; and also an allusion to the voice of the blood of the innocent Abel, which 'cried to God from the ground.' The writer has already referred to that in the earlier part of the letter; and here he weaves the two together because, with whatever differences of representation, the substantial meaning of both images is the same. The blood shed establishes the covenant; and the blood sprinkled brings us into it.

If Jesus had not died, there would have been no promises for us, beginning in forgiveness and ending in wills delighting in God's law. It is 'the new covenant in His blood.' The death of Christ is ever present to the divine mind and determines the divine action.

Hence the allusion to the voice, in contrast both to the dread voice that echoed among the grim peaks of Sinai, and to that which, as if each drop had a tongue, called from Abel's innocent blood for retribution. Christ's, too, has a voice, and that an all-powerful one. It cries for pardon with the same authority of intercession as we hear in His wondrous high-priestly prayer: 'Father, I will.'

Further, that sprinkling, which introduced technically and formally these people into that covenant, represents for us the personal application to ourselves of the power of His death and of His life by which we may make all God's promises our own, and be cleansed from all sin. It is 'sprinkled.' Then it is capable of division into indefinitely small portions, and of the closest contact with individuals. That is but a highly metaphorical way of saying that Jesus Christ has died for each of us, that each of us may find acceptance and cleansing, and the inheritance of all the promises, if we put our trust in Him.

For remember, these words of my text are the end of a great sentence, which begins, 'Ye are come.'

Faith is that coming. What did Christ say? 'He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger. He that believeth on Me shall never thirst.' There is His own interpretation of the metaphor. Whosoever trusts Him, comes to Him. If I put my tremulous faith on that dear Lord, though He be on the throne of the universe, and I down here, in this far-away dim corner of His creation, I am with Him where He is, and no film of distance need separate us. If we trust Him we come to Him. If we rest upon Him as our advocate and hope, then the loud voice of our sins will not be heard, accusing-tongued though they be, above the voice of His pleading blood.

And they who come to Christ, therein and thereby, come to all other glorious and precious persons and things in the universe. For, as I have already said, my text is the end of a long sentence, and is last named as being the foundation of all that precedes, and the condition of our finding ourselves in touch with all the other glories of which the writer has been speaking. He that comes to Christ is in the city. He that comes to Christ *is*—not *will be*—in the palace. He that comes to Christ is in the presence of the Judge. He that comes to Christ touches angels and perfected spirits, and is knit to all that are knit to the same Lord. He that comes to Christ comes to cleansing, and enters into the fulness of the promise, and lives in the presence and companionship of his present-absent Lord. If we come to Jesus by faith, Jesus will come at last to us to receive us to Himself; and join us to the choirs of the perfected spirits who 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

REFUSING GOD'S VOICE

'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.'—HEB. xii. 25.

THE writer has finished his great contrast of Judaism and Christianity as typified by the mounts Sinai and Zion. But the scene at the former still haunts his imagination and shapes this solemn warning. The multitude gathered there had shrunk from the divine voice, and 'entreated that it might not be spoken to them any more.' So may we do, standing before the better mount of a better revelation. The parallel between the two congregations at the two mountains is still more obvious if we remark that the word translated in my text 'refuse' is the same as has just been employed in a previous verse, describing the conduct of the Israelites, where it is rendered 'entreated.' It may seem strange that after so joyous and triumphant an enumeration of the glorious persons and things with whom we are brought into contact by faith, there should come the jarring note of solemn warning which seems to bring back the terrors of the ancient law. But, alas! the glories and blessedness into which faith introduces us are no guarantees against its decay; and they who are 'come unto Mount Zion and the city of the living God,' may turn their backs upon all the splendour, and wander away into the gaunt desert.

I. So we have here, first of all, the solemn possibility of refusal.

Now, to gain the whole force and solemnity of this exhortation, it is very needful to remember that it is addressed to professing Christians, who have in so far exercised real faith, as that by it 'they *are* come to

Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God.' We are to keep that clear, or we lose the whole force and meaning of this exhortation before us, which is addressed distinctly, emphatically, and, in its true application, exclusively to Christian men—'See that *ye* refuse not Him that speaketh.'

Then, again, it is to be noted that the refusal here spoken about, and against which we professing Christians are thus solemnly warned, is not necessarily entire intellectual rejection of the gospel and its message. For the Israelites, who made the original 'refusal,' to which that against which we are warned is paralleled, recognised the voice that they would not listen to as being God's voice; and just because it was His voice, wanted to hear no more of it. And so, although we may permissibly extend the words before us to include more than is thereby originally meant, yet we must remember that the true and proper application of them is to the conduct of men who, recognising that God is speaking to them, do not want to hear anything more from Him. That is to say, this warning brings to us Christians the reminder that it is possible for us so to tamper with what we know to be the uttered will and expressed commandment of God, as that our conduct is tantamount to saying, 'Be silent, O Lord! and let me not hear Thee speak any more to me.' The reason for that refusal, which thus, in its deepest criminality and darkest sin, can only be made by men that recognise the voice to be God's, lies just here, 'they could not endure that which was commanded.' So, then, the sum of the whole thing is this, that it is possible for Christian people so to cherish wills and purposes which they know to be in diametrical and flagrant contradiction

to the will and purpose of God, that obstinately they prefer to stick by their own desires, and, if it may be, to stifle the voice of God.

Then remember, too, that this refusal, which in reality is the rising up of the creature's will, tastes, inclinations, desires, against the manifest and recognised will of God, may, and as a matter of fact often does, go along with a great deal of lip reverence and unconsciously hypocritical worship. These men, from whom the writer is drawing his warning in the wilderness there, said, 'Do not let *Him* speak! We are willing to obey all that He has to command; only let it come to us through human lips, and not in these tremendous syllables that awe our spirits.' They thought themselves to be perfectly willing to keep the commandments when they were given, and all that they wanted was some little accommodation to human weakness in the selection of the medium by which the word was brought. So we may be wrenching ourselves away from the voice of God, because we uncomfortably feel that it is against our resolves, and all the while may never know that we are unwilling to obey His commandments. The unconscious refusal is the formidable and the fatal one.

It comes by reason, as I have said, fundamentally of the rising up of our own determinations and wishes against His commandments; but it is also due to other causes operating along with this. How can you hear God's voice if you are letting your own yelping dog-kennel of passions speak so loudly as they do? Will God's voice be heard in a heart that is all echoing with earthly wishes, loudly clamant for their gratification, or with sensual desires passionately

demanding their food to be flung to them? Will God's voice be heard in a heart where the janglings of contending wishes and earthly inclinations are perpetually loud in their brawling? Will it be heard in a heart which has turned itself into a sounding-board for all the noises of the world and the voices of men? The voice of God is heard in silence, and not amidst the Babel of our own hearts. And they who, unconsciously, perhaps, of what they are doing, open their ears wide to hear what they themselves in the lower parts of their souls prescribe, or bow themselves in obedience to the precepts and maxims of men round them, are really refusing to hear the voice of God.

It is not to be forgotten, howsoever, that whilst thus the true and proper application of these words is to Christian men, and the way by which we refuse to listen to that awful utterance is by withdrawing our lives from the control of His will, and dragging away our contemplations from meditation upon His word, yet there is a further form in which men may refuse that voice, which eminently threatened the persons to whom this warning was first directed. All through this letter we see that the writer is in fear that his correspondents should fall away into intellectual and complete rejection of Christianity. And the reason was mainly this, that the fall of the ancient and sacred system of the old covenant might lead them to distrust all revelation from God, and to cast aside the gospel message. So the exhortation of my text assumes a special closeness of application to us whose lot has been cast in revolutionary times, as was theirs, and who have, in our measure, something of that same experience to go through which made the sharp trial of these Hebrew Christians. To them, solid and

permanent as they had fancied them, ancient and God-appointed realities and ordinances were melting away; and it was natural that they should ask themselves, 'Is there anything that will not melt, on which we can rest?' And to us in this day much of the same sort of discipline is appointed; and we, too, have to see, both in the religious and in the social world, much evidently waxing old and ready to vanish away which our fathers thought to be permanent. And the question for us is, Is there anything that we can cling to? Yes! to the 'voice that speaks from heaven' in Jesus Christ. As long as that is sounding in our ears we can calmly look out on the evanescence of the evanescent, and confidently rely on the permanence of the permanent. And so, brother, though this, that, and the other of the externals of Christianity, in polity, in form, in mode, may be passing away, be sure of this, the solid core abides; and that core lies in the first word of this letter. 'God . . . hath spoken unto us in His Son.' See that no experience of mutation leads you to falter in your confidence in that voice, and 'see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

II. Again, note the sleepless vigilance necessary to counteract the tendency to refusal.

'See that ye refuse not.' A warning finger is, as it were, lifted. Take heed against the tendencies that lie in yourself and the temptations around you. The consciousness of the possibility of the danger is half the battle. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always,' says the psalm. 'The confident'—by which is meant the presumptuous, and not the trustful—'goeth on and is punished.' The timid—by which I mean the self-distrustful—clings to God, because he knows his danger, and is safe. If we think that we are on the

verge of falling, we are nearer standing than we ever are besides. To lay to heart the reality and the imminence and the gravity of the possibility that is disclosed here is an essential part of the means for preventing its becoming a reality. They who would say 'I cannot turn away because I have come,' have yet to learn the weakness of their own hearts and the strength of the world that draws them away. There is no security for us except in the continual temper of rooted self-distrust, for there is no motive that will drive us to the continual confidence in which alone is security but the persistent pressure of that sense that in ourselves we are nothing, and cannot but fall. I want no man to live in that selfish and anxious dread 'which hath torment,' but I am sure that the shortest road to the brave security which is certain of never being defeated is the clear and continual consciousness that

> 'In ourselves we nothing can,
> Full soon were we down-ridden;
> But for us fights the proper Man,
> Whom God Himself hath bidden.'

The dark underside of the triumphant confidence, which on its sunny side looks up to heaven and receives its light, is that self-distrust which says always to ourselves, 'We have to take heed lest we refuse Him that speaketh.'

If there is any need to dwell upon specific methods by which this vigilance and continuous self-distrust may work out for us our security, one would say—by careful trying to reverse all these conditions which, as we have seen, lead us surely to the refusal. Silence the passions, the wishes, the voices of your own wills and tastes and inclinations and purposes. Bring them

all into close touch with Him. Let there be no voice in your hearts till you know God's will; and then with a leap let your hearts be eager to do it. Keep yourselves out of the babble of the world's voices; and be accustomed to go by yourselves and let God speak. Nature seems to be silent to the busy traveller who never gets away from the thumping of the piston of the engine and the rattle of the wheels of the train. Let him go and sit down by himself on the mountain top, and the silence becomes all vocal and full of noises. Go into the lone place of silent contemplation, and so get near God, and you will hear His voice. But you will not hear it unless you still the beating of your own heart. Even in such busy lives as most of us have to live it is possible to secure some space for such solitary communion and meditation if we seriously feel that we must, and are ready to cut off needless distractions. He who thus has the habit of going alone with God will be able to hear His voice piercing through the importunate noises of earth, which drown it for others. Do promptly, precisely, perfectly, all that you know He *has* said. That is the way to sharpen your ears for the more delicate intonations of His voice, and the closer manifestations of His will. If you do not, the voice will hush itself into silence. Thus bringing your lives habitually into contact with God's word, and testing them all by it, you will not be in danger of 'refusing Him that speaketh.'

III. Lastly, note the solemn motives by which this sleepless vigilance is enforced.

'If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth'—or, perhaps, 'who on earth refused Him that spake'—'much more shall not we escape if

we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.' The clearness of the voice is the measure of the penalty of non-attention to it. The voice that spoke on earth had earthly penalties as the consequence of disobedience. The voice that speaks from heaven, by reason of its loftier majesty, and of the clearer utterances which are granted to us thereby, necessarily involves more severe and fatal issues from negligence to it.

Mark how the words of my text deepen and darken in their significance in the latter portion. In the first we had simply 'refusal,' or the desire not to hear the voice, and in the latter portion that has solidified and deepened itself into 'turning away from Him.' That is to say, when we once begin, as many professing Christians have begun, to be intolerant of God's voice meddling with their lives, we are upon an inclined plane, which, with a sharp pitch and a very short descent, carries us down to the darker condition of 'turning away from Him.' The man who stops his ears will very soon turn his back and be in flight, so far as he can, from the voice. Do not tamper with God's utterances. If you do, you have begun a course that ends in alienation from Him.

Then mark, again, the evils which fell upon these people who turned away from Him that speaketh on earth were their long wanderings in the wilderness, and their exclusion from the Land of Promise, and final deaths in the desert, where their bleaching bones lay white in the sunshine. And if you and I, dear friends, by continuous and increasing deafness to our Father's voice, have turned away from Him, then all that assemblage of flashing glories and majestic persons and of reconciling blood to which we come

by faith, will melt away, 'and leave not a wrack behind.' We shall be like men who, in a dream, have thought themselves in a king's palace, surrounded by beauty and treasures, and awaken with a start and a shiver to find themselves alone in the desert. It will be loss enough if the fair city which hath foundations, and the palace-home of the king on the mountain, and the joyful assemblage of the angels, and the Church of the firstborn, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and the blood of sprinkling, all pass away from our vision, and instead of them there is nothing left but this mean, vulgar, fleeting world. They *will* pass if you do not listen to God, and *that* is why so many of you have so little conscious contact with the unseen and glorious realities to which faith gives access.

But then there are dark and real penalties to come in another life which the writer dimly shows to us. It is no part of my business to enlarge upon these solemn warnings. An inspired man may do it. I do not think that it is reverent for me to do it much. But at the same time, let me remind you that terror is a legitimate weapon to which to appeal, and unwelcome and unfashionable as its use is nowadays, it is one of the weapons in the armoury of the true preacher of God's Word. I believe we Christian ministers would do more if we were less chary of speaking out 'the terror of the Lord.' And though I shrink from anything like vulgar and rhetorical and sensational appeals to that side of divine revelation, and to what answers to it in us, I consider that I should be a traitor to the truth if I did not declare the fact that such appeals are legitimate, and that such terror is a part of the divine revelation.

So, dear friends, though I dare not dwell upon these, I dare not burke them. I remind you—and I do no more—of the tone that runs through all this letter, of which you have such instances as these, 'If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' and 'Of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall they be thought worthy who have counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified a common thing?' 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh,' for the clearer, the tenderer, the more stringent the beseechings of the love and the warnings of Christ's voice, the more solemn the consequences if we stop our ears to it. Better to hear it now, when it warns and pleads and beseeches and comforts and hallows and quickens, than to hear it first when it rends the tombs and shakes the earth, and summons all to judgment, and condemns some to the outer darkness to which they had first condemned themselves.

GOD'S VOICE AND MAN'S ECHO

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'—HEB. xiii. 5, 6.

'HE hath said'; 'we may . . . say.' So, then, here are two voices; or, rather, a voice and an echo—God's voice of promises, and man's answering voice of confidence. God speaks to us that we may speak to Him; and when He speaks His promises, the only fitting answer is to accept them as true in all their fulness

and individual application, and to build on them a fixed confidence.

The writer quotes two passages as from the Old Testament. The first of them is not found *verbatim* anywhere there; the nearest approach to it, and obviously the source of the quotation, occurs in a connection that is worth noting. When Moses was handing over the charge of his people to his successor, Joshua, he said first to the people and then to Joshua, 'Be strong and of good courage. . . . He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.' The writer of the Epistle falls back upon these words with a slight alteration, and turns 'He' into 'I,' simply because he recognised that when Moses spoke, God was speaking through him, and countersigning with His own seal the promise which His servant made in His name. The other passage comes from the 118th Psalm. So, then, let us listen to the divine voice and the human answer.

I. God's voice of promise.

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, notice that there is a distinct parallel between the position of the people to whom this Epistle was addressed, and that of the Hebrews to whom the original promise was made. The latter were standing on the verge of a great change. They were passing from under the leadership of Moses, and going under the leadership of the untried Joshua. Is it fanciful to recall that Joshua and Jesus are the same name; and that the difficulty which Israel on the borders of Canaan had to face, and the difficulty which these Hebrew Christians had to encounter, were similar, being in each case a change of leaders—the ceasing to look to Moses and the beginning to take commands

from another? To men in such a crisis, when venerable authority was becoming antiquated, it might seem as if nothing was stable. Very appropriate, therefore, and strong was the encouragement given by pointing away from the flowing river to the Rock of Ages, rising changeless above the changing current of human life. So Moses said to his generation, and the author of the Epistle says after him to his contemporaries—you may change the leaders, but you keep the one Presence.

This letter goes on the principle throughout that everything which belonged to Israel, in the way of institutions, sacred persons, promises, is handed over to the Christian Church, and we are, as it were, served heirs to the whole of these. So, then, to every one of us the message comes, and comes in its most individual aspect, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, 'to leave' and 'to forsake' are identical, and the promise, if we keep to the Authorised Version, is a repetition, in the two clauses, of the same thought. But whilst the two clauses are substantially identical, there is a very beautiful variation in the form in which the one assurance is given in them. With regard to the first of them, 'I will never leave thee,' both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word which is employed, and which is translated 'leave,' means the withdrawing of a hand that sustains. And so the Revised Version wisely substitutes for 'leave thee,' 'I will never fail thee.' We might even put it more colloquially, and approach more nearly the original expression, if we said, 'He will never drop thee'; never let His hand slacken, never withdraw its sustaining power, but will communicate for ever, day by day, not only the strength, but the conscious security that comes from

feeling that great, strong, gentle hand, closing thee round and keeping thee tight. No man 'shall pluck them out of My father's hand.' 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall,' says one Psalm, and another of the psalmists puts it even more picturesquely; 'When I said my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up,' To say '*my* foot slippeth,' with a strong emphasis on the 'my,' is the sure way to be able to say the other thing: 'Thy mercy held me up.' 'He shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand.' Suppose a man on some slippery glacier, not accustomed to ice-work, as he feels his foot going out from under him, he gets nervous, and nervousness means a fall, and a fall means disaster and sometimes death. So he grips the guide's hand, and then he can walk. There is Peter, out on the sea that he had presumptuously asked leave to walk on, and as he feels the cold water coming above his ankle, and sees it rising higher and higher, he begins to fear, and his fear makes him heavier, so that he sinks the faster, till the very extremity of need and paroxysm of terror strike out a spark of faith, and faith and fear are strangely blended in the cry: 'Lord, save me.' Christ's outstretched hand answered the cry, and its touch held Peter up, made him buoyant again, and as he rose, the water seemed to sink beneath his feet, and on that heaving pavement, glistening in the moonlight, he walked till he was helped into the boat again. So will God do for us, if we will, for He has said: 'I will never relax My grasp. Nothing shall ever come between My hand and thine.' When a nurse or a mother is holding a child's hand, her grip slackens unless it is perpetually repeated by fresh nervous tension. So all human helps tend to become less helpful, and all human love

has its limits. But God's hand never slackens its grip, and we may be sure that, as He has grasped He will hold, and 'keep that which we have committed unto Him.'

But mark the other form of the promise. 'I will never drop thee'—that promises the communication of sustaining strength according to our need: 'nor forsake thee'—that is the same promise, in another shape. The tottering limbs need to be held up. The lonely heart walking the way of life, lonely after all companionship, and which has depths that the purest human love cannot sound, and sometimes dark secrets that it durst not admit the dearest to behold—that heart may have a divine companion. Here is a word for the solitary, and we are all solitary. Some of us, more plainly than others, are called upon to walk a lonely road in a great darkness, and to live lives little apprehended, little sympathised with, by others, or perchance having for our best companion, next to God, the memories of those who are beside us no more. Moses died, Joshua took his place; but behind the dying Moses—buried in his unknown grave, and left far away as the files crossed the Jordan—and behind the living Joshua, there was the Lord who liveth for ever. 'I will not forsake thee.' Dear ones go, and take half our hearts with them. People misunderstand us. We feel that we dare not open out our whole selves to any. We feel that, just as scientists tell us that no two atoms of the most solid body are in actual juxtaposition, but that there is a film of air between them, and hence all bodies are more or less elastic, if sufficient pressure be applied, so after the closest companionship there is a film. But that film makes no separation between us and God. 'I will not drop thee'

—there is the strength according to our need. 'I will not forsake thee,' there is companionship in all our solitude.

But do not let us forget that all God's promises have conditions appended, and that this one has its conditions like all the rest. Was not the history of Israel a contradiction of that glowing promise which was given them before they crossed the Jordan? Does the Jew to-day look as if he belonged to a nation that God would never leave nor forsake? Certainly not. And why? Simply because God's promise of not dropping us, and of never leaving us, is contingent upon our not dropping Him, and of our never leaving Him. 'No man shall pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No; but they can wriggle themselves out of their Father's hand. They can break the communion; they can separate themselves, and bring a film, not of impalpable and pure atmosphere, but of poisonous gases, between themselves and God. And God who, according to the grand old legend, before the Roman soldier flung his torch into the Holy of Holies, and 'burnt up the beautiful house where our fathers praised Him with fire,' was heard saying, 'Let us depart hence,' does say sometimes, when a man has gone away from Him, 'I will go and return to My place until they seek Me. In their affliction, they will seek Me early.'

And now let me say a word about the second voice that sounds here.

II. The human answer, or the echo of the divine voice.

If God speaks to me, He waits for me to speak to Him. My answer should be immediate, and my answer should embrace as true all that He has said to me, and my answer should build upon His great faithful

promise a great triumphant confidence. Do we speak to God in the strain in which He speaks to us? When He says, 'I will,' do our hearts leap up with joyful confidence, and answer, 'Thou dost'? Do we take all His promises for our trust, or do we meet His firm assurance with a feeble, faltering faith? We turn God's 'verily' into a peradventure, often, and at best when He says to us 'I will,' we doubtingly say 'perhaps He may.' That is the kind of faith, even at its highest, with which the best of us meet this great promise, building frail tabernacles on the Rock of Ages and putting shame on God's faithfulness by our faithlessness. 'He hath said,' and then He pauses and listens, whether we are going to say anything in answer, and whether when He promises: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' we are bold to say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.'

Now, I do not suppose that I am keeping too slavishly to the mere words of the text if I ask you to look at the beautiful sequence of thought in these three clauses which make the response of the man to the divine promise. There is a kind of throb of wonder in that word. 'The Lord is my helper.' That is the answer of faith to the divine promise, grasping it, never hesitating about it, laying it upon the heart, or on the fevered forehead like a cooling leaf, to subdue the hot pulsations there. And then what comes next? 'I will not fear.' We have the power of controlling our apprehension of peril, but it is of no use to screw ourselves up to a fictitious courage which consists mainly in the ostrich's wisdom of hiding its head from the danger, and in saying, 'Who is afraid?' Unless we can say 'The Lord is my helper,' it is folly to say, 'I will not be afraid, I will

brace myself up, and be courageous to meet these difficulties.' That is all right, but it is *not* all right, unless we have laid the right foundation for courage. Having our purged ears opened to hear the great, strong, sweet divine promise, we are able to coerce our terrors, and to banish them from our minds by the assurance that, whatever comes, God is with us. 'The Lord is my helper'—that is the foundation, and built upon that—and madness unless it is built upon it—is the courage which says to all my fears, 'Down, down, you are not to get the mastery over me.' 'I will trust,' says the Psalmist, 'and not be afraid.' Faith is the antagonist to fear, because faith grasps the fact of the divine promise.

Now, there is another thought which may come in here since it is suggested by the context, and that is, that the recognition of God thus, as always with us to sustain us, makes all earthly conditions tolerable. The whole of my text is given as the ground of the exhortation: 'Be content with such things as ye have,' for He hath said, 'I will never leave thee.' If Thou dost not leave me, then such things as I have are enough for me, and if Thou hast gone away, no things that I merely have are of much good to me.

And then comes the last stage in our answer to what God says, which is better represented by a slight variation in translation, putting the last words of my text as a question: 'What can man do unto me?' It is safe to look at men and things, and their possibly calamitous action upon our outward lives, when we have done the other two things, grasped God and rested in faith on Him. If we begin with what ought to come last, and look first at what man can do unto us, then fear will surge over us, as it ought to do. But if we follow the

order of faith, and start with God's promise, grapple that to our heart, and put down with strong hand the craven dread that coils round our hearts, then we can look out with calm eyes upon all the appearances that may threaten evil, and say, 'Come on, come all, my foot is on the Rock of Ages, and my back is against it. No man can touch me.' So we may boldly say, 'What can man do unto me?'

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'
HEB. xiii. 8.

How far back does this 'yesterday' go? The limit must be found by observing that it is 'Jesus Christ' who is spoken of—that is to say, the *Incarnate* Saviour. That observation disposes of the reference of these words to the past eternity in which the eternal Word of God was what He is to-day. The sameness that is referred to here is neither the sameness of the divine Son from all eternity, nor the sameness of the medium of revelation in both the old and the new dispensations, but the sameness of the *human* Christ to all generations of His followers. And the epoch referred to in the 'yesterday' is defined more closely if we observe the previous context, which speaks of the dying teachers who have had the rule and have passed away. The 'yesterday' is the period of these departed teachers; the 'to-day' is the period of the writer and his readers.

But whilst the words of my text are thus narrowly limited, the attribute, which is predicated of Christ in them, is something more than belongs to manhood,

and requires for its foundation the assumption of His deity. He is the unchanging Jesus because He is the divine Son. The text resumes at the end of the Epistle, the solemn words of the first chapter, which referred the declaration of the Psalmist to 'the Son'—'Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.' That Son, changeless and eternal by divine immutability, is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Redeemer.

This text may well be taken as our motto in looking forward, as I suppose we are all of us more or less doing, and trying to forecast the dim outlines of the coming events of this New Year. Whatever may happen, let us hold fast by that confidence, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

I. I apply these words, then, as a New-Year's motto, in two or three different directions, and ask you to consider, first, the unchanging Christ in His relation to our changeful lives.

The one thing of which anticipation may be sure is that nothing continues in one stay. True, 'that which is to be hath already been'; true, there is 'nothing new under the sun'; but just as in the physical world the infinite variety of creatures and things is all made out of a few very simple elements, so, in our lives, out of a comparatively small number of possible incidents, an immense variety of combinations results, with the effect that, while we may be sure of the broad outlines of our future, we are all in the dark as to its particular events, and only know that ceaseless change will characterise it. So all forward looking must have a touch of fear in it, and there is only one thing that will enable us to front the else intolerable certainty of uncertainty, and that is, to fall back upon this thought

of my text, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

The one lesson of our changeful lives ought to be for each of us the existence of that which changes not. By the very law of contrast, and by the need of finding sufficient reason for the changes, we are driven from the contemplation of the fleeting to the vision of the permanent. The waves of this stormy sea of life ought to fling us all high and dry on the safe shore. Blessed are they who, in a world of passing phenomena, penetrate to the still centre of rest, and looking over all the vacillations of the things that can be shaken, can turn to the Christ and say, Thou who movest all things art Thyself unmoved; Thou who changest all things, Thyself changest not. As the moon rises slow and silvery, with its broad shield, out of the fluctuations of the ocean, so the one radiant Figure of the all-sufficient and immutable Lover and Friend of our souls should rise for us out of the billows of life's tossing ocean, and come to us across the seas. Brother! let the fleeting proclaim to you the permanent; let the world with its revolutions lead you up to the thought of Him who is the same for ever. For that is the only thought on which a man can build, and, building, be at rest.

The yesterday of my text may either be applied to the generations that have passed, and then the 'to-day' is our little life; or may be applied to my own yesterday, and then the to-day is this narrow present. In either application the words of my text are full of hope and of joy. In the former they say to us that no time can waste, nor any drawing from the fountain can diminish the all-sufficiency of that divine Christ in whom eighteen centuries have trusted and been

'lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' The yesterday of His grace to past generations is the prophecy of the future and the law for the present. There is nothing that any past epoch has ever drawn from Him, of courage and confidence, of hope and wisdom, of guidance and strength, of love and consolation, of righteousness and purity, of brave hope and patient endurance, which He does not stand by my side ready to give to me too to-day, 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts,' and the old Christ of a thousand years ago is the Christ of to-day, ready to help, to succour, and to make us like Himself.

In the second reference, narrowing the 'yesterdays' to our own experiences, the words are full of consolation and of hope. 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me,' is the prayer that ought to be taught us by every remembrance of what Jesus Christ has been to us. The high-water mark of His possible sweetness does not lie in some irrevocable past moment of our lives. We never have to say that we have found a sufficiency in Him which we never shall find any more. Remember the time in your experience when Jesus Christ was most tender, most near, most sweet, most mysterious, most soul-sufficing for you, and be sure that He stands beside you, ready to renew the ancient blessing and to surpass it in His gift. Man's love sometimes wearies, Christ's never; man's basket may be emptied, Christ's is fuller after the distribution than it was before. This fountain can never run dry. Not until seven times, but until seventy times seven—perfection multiplied into perfection, and that again multiplied by perfection once more—is the limit of the inexhaustible mercy of our

Lord, and all in which the past has been rich lives in the present.

Remember, too, that this same thought which heartens us to front the inevitable changes, also gives dignity, beauty, poetry, to the small prosaic present. 'Jesus Christ is the same *to-day*.' We are always tempted to think that this moment is commonplace and insignificant. Yesterday lies consecrated in memory; to-morrow, radiant in hope; but to-day is poverty-stricken and prose. The sky is farthest away from us right over our heads; behind and in front it seems to touch the earth. But if we will only realise that all that sparkling lustre and all that more than mortal tenderness of pity and of love with which Jesus Christ has irradiated and sweetened any past is verily here with us amidst the commonplaces and insignificant duties of the dusty to-day, then we need look back to no purple distance, nor forward to any horizon where sky and earth kiss, but feel that here or nowhere, now or never, is Christ the all-sufficient and unchanging Friend. He is faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

II. So, secondly, I apply these words in another direction. I ask you to think of the relation between the unchanging Christ and the dying helpers.

That is the connection in which the words occur in my text. The writer has been speaking of the subordinate and delegated leaders and rulers in the Church 'who have spoken the word of God' and who have passed away, leaving a faith to be followed, and a conversation the end of which is to be considered. And, turning from all these mortal companions, helpers, guides, he bids us think of Him who liveth for ever,

and for ever is the teacher, the companion, the home of our hearts, and the goal of our love. All other ties—sweet, tender, infinitely precious, have been or will be broken for you and me. Some of us have to look back upon their snapping; some of us have to look forward. But there is one bond over which the skeleton fingers of Death have no power, and they fumble at that knot in vain. He separates us from all others; blessed be God! he cannot separate us from Christ. 'I shall not lose Thee though I die'; and Thou, Thou diest never.

God's changeful providence comes into all our lives, and parts dear ones, making their places empty, that Christ Himself may fill the empty places, and, striking away other props, though the tendrils that twine round them bleed with the wrench, in order that the plant may no longer trail along the ground, but twine itself round the Cross and climb to the Christ upon the throne. 'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne.' The true King was manifested when the earthly, shadowy monarch was swept away. And just as, on the face of some great wooded cliff, when the leaves drop, the solemn strength of the everlasting rock gleams out pure, so when our dear ones fall away, Jesus Christ is revealed, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' 'They truly were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death.' 'This Man continueth ever.' He lives, and in Him all loves and companionships live unchanged.

III. So, further, we apply, in the third place, this thought to the relation between the unchanging Christ and decaying institutions and opinions.

The era in which this Epistle was written was an era of revolution so great that we can scarcely

imagine its apparent magnitude. It was close upon the final destruction of the ancient system of Judaism as an external institution. The temple was tottering to its fall, the nation was ready to be scattered, and the writer, speaking to Hebrews, to whom that crash seemed to be the passing away of the eternal verities of God, bids them lift their eyes above all the chaos and dust of dissolving institutions and behold the true Eternal, the ever-living Christ. He warns them in the verse that follows my text not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines, but to keep fast to the unchanging Jesus. And so these words may well come to us with lessons of encouragement, and with teaching of duty and steadfastness, in an epoch of much unrest and change—social, theological, ecclesiastical—such as that in which our lot is cast. Man's systems are the shadows on the hillside. Christ is the everlasting solemn mountain itself. Much in the popular conception and representation of Christianity is in the act of passing. Let it go; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. We need not fear change within the limits of His Church or of His world. For change there means progress, and the more the human creations and embodiments of Christian truth crumble and disintegrate, the more distinctly does the solemn, single, unique figure of Christ the Same, rise before us. There is nothing in the world's history to compare with the phenomenon which is presented by the unworn freshness of Jesus Christ after all these centuries. All other men, however burning and shining their light, flicker and die out into extinction, and but for a season can the world rejoice in any of their beams; but this Jesus dominates the ages, and is as fresh to-day, in spite of

all that men say, as He was eighteen centuries ago. They tell us He is losing His power; they tell us that mists of oblivion are wrapping Him round, as He moves slowly to the doom which besets Him in common with all the great names of the world. The wish is father to the thought. Christ is not done with yet, nor has the world done with Him, nor is He less available for the necessities of this generation, with its perplexities and difficulties, than He was in the past. His sameness is consistent with an infinite unfolding of new preciousness and new powers, as new generations with new questions arise, and the world seeks for fresh guidance. 'I write no new commandment unto you'; I preach no new Christ unto you, 'again, a new commandment I write unto you,' and every generation will find new impulse, new teaching, new shaping energies, social and individual, ecclesiastical, theological, intellectual, in the old Christ who was crucified for our offences and raised again for our justification, and remains 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

IV. Lastly, look at these words in their application to the relation between the unchanging Christ and the eternal life of heaven.

The 'for ever' of my text is not to be limited to this present life, but it runs on into the remotest future, and summons up before us the grand and boundless prospect of an eternal unfolding and reception of new beauties in the old earthly Christ. For Him the change between the 'to-day' of His earthly life and the 'for ever' of His ascended glory made no change in the tenderness of His heart, the sweetness of His smile, the nearness of His helping hand. The beloved apostle, when he saw Him for the first time after He

was ascended, fell at His feet as dead, because the attributes of His nature had become so glorious. But when the old hand, the same hand that had been pierced with the nails on the Cross, though it now held the seven stars, was laid upon him, and the old voice, the same voice that had spoken to him in the upper room, and in feebleness from the Cross, though it was now as the 'sound of many waters,' said to him, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead and am alive for ever more'; John learned that the change from the Cross to the throne touched but the circumference of his Master's being, and left the whole centre of His love and brotherhood wholly unaffected.

Nor will the change for us, from earth to the close communion of the heavens, bring us into contact with a changed Christ. It will be but like the experience of a man starting from the outermost verge of the solar system, where that giant planet welters, away out in the darkness and the cold, and travelling inwards ever nearer and nearer to the central light, the warmth becoming more fervent, the radiance becoming more wondrous, as he draws closer and closer to the greatness which he divined when he was far away, and which he knows better when he is beside it. It will be the same Christ, the Mediator, the Revealer in heaven, whom we here dimly saw and knew to be the Sun of our souls through the clouds and mists of earth. That radiant and eternal sameness will consist with continual variety, and an endless streaming forth of new lustres and new powers. But through all the growing proximity and illumination of the heavens He will be the same Jesus that we knew upon earth; still the Friend and the Lover of our souls.

So, dear friends, if you and I have Him for our very own, then we do not need to fear change, for change will be progress; nor loss, for loss will be gain; nor the storm of life, which will drive us to His breast; nor the solitude of death, for our Shepherd will be with us there. He will be 'the same for ever'; though we shall know Him more deeply; even as we shall be the same, though 'changed from glory into glory.' If we have Him, we may be sure, on earth, of a 'to-morrow,' which 'shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' If we have Him, we may be sure of a heaven in which the sunny hours of its unending day will be filled with fruition and ever new glories from the old Christ who, for earth and heaven, is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

AN ESTABLISHED HEART

'. . . It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.'—HEB. xiii. 9.

THIS saying immediately follows the exhortation with which it is contrasted: 'Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines.' Now, it is quite clear that the unsettlement and moving past some fixed point which are suggested in the word 'carried away' are contrasted with the fixedness which is implied in the main word of our text. They who are established, 'rooted and grounded,' are not apt to be swept away by the blasts of 'divers and strange doctrines.' But there is another contrast besides this, and that is the one which exists between doctrines and grace; and there is a still further subsequent contrast in the words that follow my text, 'It is a good

thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats.

Now I need not trouble you with the question as to what was the original reference of either of these two expressions, 'doctrines' and 'meats,' or whether they both point to some one form of teaching. What I rather want to emphasise here, in a sentence, is how, in these three principal words of three successive clauses, we get three aspects of the religious life—two of them spurious and partial, one of them sufficing and complete—'teachings'; 'grace'; 'meats.' Turned into modern English, the writer's meaning is that the merely intellectual religion, which is always occupied with propositions instead of with Jesus Christ, 'Who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,' is worthless, and the merely ceremonial religion, which is always occupied with casuistries about questions of meats, or external observance of any sort, is as valueless. There is no fixity; there is no rest of soul, no steadfastness of character to be found in either of these two directions. The only thing that ballasts and fills and calms the heart is what the writer here calls 'grace,' that is to say, the living personal experience of the love of God bestowed upon me and dwelling in my heart. You may have doctrines chattered to all eternity, and you may be so occupied about the externals of religion as that you never come near its centre, and its centre is that great thing which is here called 'grace,' which alone has power to establish the man's heart.

So, then, the main theme of these words is the possible stability of a fluctuating human life, the means of securing it, and the glory and beauty of the character which has secured it. Let us turn to these thoughts for a moment.

I. First, then, mark what this writer conceives to be the one source of human stability.

'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.' Now I have a strong suspicion that a great deal of preaching goes over the heads of the hearers, because preachers have not gauged the ignorance of their auditory, and that, howsoever familiar to the ear the key-words of Christian revelation may be, it by no means follows that there is any definite and clear idea attached to these. So I do not think that it will be a waste of time for just a minute or two to try and put, as plainly as I can, what the New Testament means by this familiar and frequently reiterated word 'grace,' which, I suspect, is oftener pronounced than it is understood by a great many people.

To begin with, then, the root meaning of that word, which runs all through the New Testament, is simply favour, benignity, kindness, or to put all into a better and simpler form, the active love of God. Now, if we look at the various uses of the expression we find, for instance, that it is contrasted with a number of other things. Sometimes it is set in opposition to sin—sin reigns to righteousness, grace reigns to life. Sometimes it is contrasted with 'debt,' and sometimes put in opposition to 'works,' as, for instance, by Paul when he says, 'If it be of works then is it no more grace.' Sometimes it is opposed to law, as in the same apostle's words, 'Ye are not under law, but under grace.' Now, if we keep these various uses and contrasts in view we just come to this thought, that that active love of God is conditioned, not by any merit on our part—bubbles up from the depths of His own infinite heart, not because of what we are, but because of what He is, transcends all the rigid retributions of law, is not

turned away by any sin, but continues to flood the world, simply because it wells up from the infinite and changeless fountain of love in the heart of God.

And then, from this central, deepest meaning of active love manifesting itself irrespective of what we deserve, there comes a second great aspect of the word. The cause gives its name to the effect, and the communicated blessings and gifts which flow to men from the love of God are designated by this great name. You know we have the same kind of idiom in our own tongue. 'Kindness' is the disposition; '*a* kindness' is a single deed which flows from that disposition. 'Favour' is the way in which we regard a man; '*a* favour' is the act or gift which manifests and flows from the regard. The water in the pitchers is the same as the water in the spring. The name of the cause is extended to all the lustrous variety of its effects. So the complex whole of the blessings and gifts which Jesus Christ brings to us, and which are sometimes designated in view of what they do for us, as salvation or eternal life, are also designated in view of that in God from which they come, as being collectively His 'grace.'

All the gifts that Christ brings are, we may say, but the love of God made visible in its bestowal upon us. The meteor that rushes through space catches fire when it passes into our atmosphere. The love of God, when it comes into our manifold necessities, is made visible in the large gifts which it bestows upon them.

And then there is a final application of the expression which is deduced from that second one—viz., the specific and individual excellences of character or conduct which result from the communication to men of the blessings that flow to Him from the love of God.

So these three: first the fountain, the love undisturbed and unalterable; second, the stream, the manifold gifts and blessings that flow to us through Christ; and third, the little cupfuls that each of us have, the various beauties and excellences of character which are developed under the fertilising influences of the sunshine of that love—these three are all included in this great Christian word.

There are other phases of its employment in the New Testament which I do not need to trouble you with now. But thus far we just come to this, that the one ground on which all steadfastness and calm tranquillity and settlement of nature and character can be reared is that we shall be in touch with God, shall be conscious of His love, and shall be receiving into our hearts the strength that He bestows. Man is a dependent creature; his make and his relationships to things round him render it impossible that the strength by which he is strong and the calmness by which he is established can be self-originated. They must come from without. There is only one way by which we can be kept from being drifted away by the currents and blown away by the tempests that run and range through every life, and that is that we shall anchor ourselves on God. His grace, His love possessed, and the sufficing gifts for all our hungry desires which come through that love possessed, these, and these alone, are the conditions of human stability.

II. And so I come, in the second place, to look at some of the various ways in which this establishing grace calms and stills the life.

We men are like some of the islands in the Eastern Tropics, fertile and luxuriant, but subject to be swept by typhoons, to be shaken by earthquakes, to be

devastated by volcanoes. Around us there gather external foes assailing our steadfastness, and within us there lie even more formidable enemies to an established and settled peace. We are like men carrying powder through a conflagration; bearing a whole magazine of combustibles within us, upon which at any moment a spark may alight. How are such creatures ever to be established? My text tells us by drawing into themselves the love, the giving love of God; and in the consciousness of that love, and in the rest of spirit that comes from the true possession of its gifts, there will be found the secret of tranquillity for the most storm-ridden life.

I would note, as one of the aspects of the tranquillity and establishment that comes from this conscious possession of the giving love of God, how it delivers men from all the dangers of being 'carried away by divers strange doctrines.' I do not give much for any orthodoxy which is not vitalised by personal experiences of the indwelling love of God. I do not care much what a man believes, or what he denies, or how he may occupy himself intellectually with the philosophical and doctrinal aspect of Christian revelation. The question is, how much of it has filtered from his brain into his heart, and has become part of himself, and verified to himself by his own experience? So much, and not one hairbreadth more, of the Christian creed is your creed. So much as you have lived out, so much you are sure of because you have not only thought it but felt it, and cannot for a moment doubt, because your hearts have risen up and witnessed to its truth. About these parts of your belief there will be no fluctuation. There is no real and permanent grasp of any parts of religious truth except such as is verified

by personal experience. And that sturdy blind man in the gospels had got hold of the true principle of the most convincing Christian apologetics when he said, 'You may talk as long as you like about the question whether this man is a sinner or not; settle it anyhow you please. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.' The 'grace' that had come to him in a purely external form established as a foundation axiom for his thinking, that the man who had done that for him was a messenger from God. That is the way by which you will come to a hold worth calling so of Christian truth, and unless you come to it by that hold it does not matter much whether you believe it or deny it all.

But, if there be such a living consciousness of the true possession of God's love giving you these blessings, then with great equanimity and openness of mind you can regard the discussion that may be raging about a great many so-called 'burning' questions. If I know that Jesus Christ died for me, and that my soul is saved because He did, it does not matter very much to me who wrote the Pentateuch, or whether the Book of Jonah is a parable or a history. I can let all such questions—and I only refer to these as specimens—be settled by appropriate evidence, by the experts, without putting myself in a fluster, and can say, 'I am not going to be carried away. My heart is established in grace.'

Still further, this conscious possession of the grace of God will keep a man very quiet amidst all the occasions for agitation which changing circumstances bring. Such there are in every life. Nothing continues in one stay. Thunder-claps, earthquakes, tempests, shocks of doom come to every one of us. Is it possible that

amidst this continuous fluctuation, in which nothing is changeless but the fact of change, we can stand fixed and firm? Yes! As they say on the other side of the Border, there is a 'lown' place at the back of the wall. There is shelter only in one spot, and that is when we have God between us and the angry blast. And oh, brother, if there steal into a man's heart, and be faithfully kept there, the quiet thought that God is with him, to bless and keep and communicate to him all that he needs, why should he be troubled? 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.' What! In this world full of evil? Yes. 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed; trusting in the Lord.' An empty heart is an easily agitated heart. A full heart, like a full sack, stands upright, and it is not so easy for the wind to whirl it about as if it were empty. They who are rooted in God will have a firm bole, which will be immovable, howsoever branches may sway and creak, and leaves may flutter and dance, or even fall, before the power of the storm. They who have no hold upon that grace are like the chaff which the wind drives from the threshing-floor. The storms of life will sweep you away unless the heart be 'established in grace.'

Further, another form of the stability communicated by that possessed love of God is in regard to the internal occasions for agitation. Passion, lust, hot desires, bitter regrets, eager clutching after uncertain and insufficient and perishable good, all these will be damped down if the love of God lives in our hearts. Oh, brethren, it is ourselves that disturb ourselves, and not the world that disturbs us. 'There is no joy but calm'; and there is no calm but in the possession of the grace which is the giving love of God.

III. Lastly, my text suggests how beautiful a thing is the character of the man that is established in grace.

The word translated 'good' in my text would be better rendered 'fair,' or 'lovely,' or 'beautiful,' or some such expression conveying the idea that the writer was thinking, not so much about the essential goodness as about the beauty, in visible appearance, of a character which was thus established by grace. Is there anything fairer than the strong, steadfast, calm, equable character, unshaken by the storms of passion, unaffected by the blasts of calamity, undevastated by the lava from the hellish subterranean fires that are in every soul; and yet not stolidly insensible nor obstinately conservative, but open to the inspiration of each successive moment, and gathering the blessed fruit of all mutability in a more profound and unchanging possession of the unchanging good? Surely the gospel which brings to men the possibility of being thus established brings to them the highest ideal of fair human character.

So do you see to it that you rectify your notions of what makes the beauty of character. There is many a poor old woman in a garret who presents, if not to men, at any rate to angels and to God, a far fairer character than the vulgar ideals which most people have. The beauty of meek patience, of persistent endeavour, of calm, steadfast trust, is fairer than all the 'purple patches' which the world admires because they are gaudy, and which an eye educated by looking at Jesus turns from with disgust. And do you see to it that you cultivate that type of excellence. It is a great deal easier to cultivate other kinds. It is hard to be quiet, hard to rule one's stormy nature, hard to

stand 'foursquare to every wind that blows.' But it is possible—possible on one condition, that we drive our roots through all the loose shingle on the surface, 'the things seen and temporal,' and penetrate to the eternal substratum that lies beneath it all.

Then, my brother, if we keep ourselves near Jesus Christ, and let His grace flow into our hearts, then we, too, shall be able to say, 'Because I set Him at my right hand I shall not be moved,' and we may be able to carry, by His grace, even through the storms of life and amidst all the agitations of our own passions and desires, a steady light, neither blown about by tempests without, nor pulsating with alternations of brightness and dimness by reason of intermittent supplies from within, but blazing with the steadfast splendour of the morning star. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

OUR ALTAR

'We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. 15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' —Heb. xiii. 10, 15.

'We *have* an altar.' There is a certain militant emphasis on the words in the original, as if they were an assertion of something that had been denied. Who the deniers are is plain enough. They were the adherents of Judaism, who naturally found Christianity a strange contrast to their worship, of which altar and sacrifice were prominent features.

Just as to heathen nations the ritual of Judaism, its empty shrine, and temple without a God, were a puzzle and a scoff, so to heathen and Jew, the bare, starved

worship of the Church, without temple, priest, sacrifice, or altar, was a mystery and a puzzle.

The writer of this letter in these words, then, in accordance with the central theme of his whole Epistle, insists that Christianity has more truly than heathenism or Judaism, altar and sacrifice.

And he is not content with alleging its possession of the reality of the altar, but he goes further, insists upon the superiority, even in that respect, of the Christian system.

He points to the fact that the great sin-offering of the Jewish ritual was not partaken of by the offerers, but consumed by fire without the camp, and he implies, in the earlier words of my text, that the Christian sacrifice differs from, and is superior to, the Jewish in this particular, that on it the worshippers feasted and fed.

Then, in the last words of my text, he touches upon another point of superiority—viz., that all Christian men are priests of this altar, and have to offer upon it sacrifices of thanksgiving.

And so he exalts the purely spiritual worship of Christianity as not only possessed of all which the gorgeous rituals round about it presented, but as being high above them even in regard to that which seemed their special prerogative. So, then, we have three things here—our Christian altar; our Christian feast on the sacrifice; and our Christian sacrifices on the altar. Let us regard these successively.

I. First, then, our Christian altar.

'We *have*,' says the writer, with a triumphant emphasis upon the word, 'We have an altar'; 'though there seems none visible in our external worship; and some of our converts miss the sensuous presentation

to which they were accustomed; and others are puzzled by it, and taunt us with its absence.'

Now it is to be noticed, I think, that though in sacrificial religions the altar is the centre-point round which the temple is reared, it is of no moment in itself, and only comes into consideration as being that upon which the sacrifice is offered. So I do not suppose that any specific object was in the mind of the writer as answering to the altar in these sacrificial systems. He was thinking most of the sacrifice that was laid upon the altar, and of the altar only in connection therewith. But if we are not satisfied with such an explanation of the words, there are two interpretations open to us.

One is that the Cross is the altar. But that seems to me too gross and material, and savouring too much of the very error which this whole Epistle is written to destroy—viz., that the material is of moment, as measured against the spiritual. The other explanation is much to be preferred, according to which, if the altar has any special significance, it means the divine-human personality of Jesus Christ, on and in which the sacrifice is offered.

But the main thing to be laid hold of here is, I take it, that the central fact of Christianity is an altar, on which lies a sacrifice. If we are to accept the significance that I have suggested as possible for the emblem of my text, then the altar expresses the great mystery and gospel of the Incarnation, and the sacrifice expresses the great mystery and gospel of the passion of Christ's life and death, which is the atonement for our sins.

But that possibly is too much of a refinement, and so I confine myself here to the general ideas suggested

—that the very living heart of the gospel is an altar and a sacrifice. That idea saturates the whole New Testament, from the page where John the forerunner's proclamation is, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' to the last triumphant vision in which the Apocalyptic seer 'beheld a Lamb as it had been slain'; the eternal Co-Regnant of the universe, and the mediation through whom the whole surrounding Church for ever worships the Father.

The days are past, as it seems to me, when any man can reasonably contend that the New Testament does not teach—in every page of it, I was going to say—this truth of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Time was when violent contortions and effort were resorted to in order to explain its language as not necessarily involving that significance. But we have got beyond that now, and we oftener hear from deniers this: 'Oh yes! I admit that throughout the New Testament this sacrificial idea is present, but that is only a chip of the old shell of Judaism, and we are above that level of religious thought.'

Now, I am not going to enter upon a discussion, for which neither place nor time are suited; but I will just suggest that the relation between the ancient system of revelation, with its sacrifice, altar, priest, temple, and the new system of Christianity is far more profoundly, and, I believe, far more philosophically, set forth in this Epistle to the Hebrews, as being the relation between shadow and substance, between prophecy and fulfilment, than when the old is contemptuously brushed aside as 'Hebrew old clothes,' with which the true Christianity has no concern. Judaism *was* because Christ was *to be*, and the ancient ritual (whether modern ideas of the date of its origin be

accepted or no) was a God-appointed mirror, in which the shadow of the coming event was presented. Jesus Christ is all which temple, priest, altar, sacrifice proclaimed should one day be. And just as the relation between Christ's work and the Judaic system of external ritual sacrifices is that of shadow and substance, prophecy and fulfilment, so, in analogous manner, the relation between the altar and sacrifice of the New Testament and all the systems of heathenism, with their smoking altars, is that these declare a want, and this affords its supply; that these are the confession of humanity that it is conscious of sin, separation, alienation, and that need of a sacrifice, and that Christ is what heathenism in all lands has wailed that it needs, and has desperately hoped that it might find.

There are many attempts made to explain on other grounds the universality of sacrifice, and to weaken the force of its witness to the deep necessities of humanity as rooted in the consciousness of sin, but I venture to affirm that all these are superficial, and that the study of comparative religions goes on wrong lines unless it recognises in the whole heathen world a longing, the supply of which it recognises in Jesus Christ and His work. I venture to say that that is a truer philosophy of religion than much that nowadays calls itself by the name.

And what lies in this great thought? I am not going to attempt a theory of the Atonement. I do not believe that any such thing is completely possible for us. But this, at least, I recognise as being fundamental and essential to the thought of my text; 'we have an altar,' that Christ in His representative relation, in His true affinity to every man upon earth, has in His life or death taken upon Himself the consequences

of human transgression, not merely by sympathy, nor only by reason of the uniqueness of His representative relation, but by willing submission to that awful separation from the Father, of which the cry out of the thick darkness of the Cross, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' is the unfathomable witness. Thus, bearing our sin, He bears it away, and 'we have an altar.'

Now notice that this great truth has a distinct teaching for those who hanker after externalities of ritual. The writer of this Epistle uses it for the purpose of declaring that in the Christian Church, because of its possession of the true sacrifice, there is no room for any other; that priest, temple, altar, sacrifice in any material external forms are an anachronism and a contradiction of the very central idea of the gospel. And it seems very strange that sections of Christendom should so have been blind to the very meaning of my text, and so missed the lesson which it teaches, and fallen into the error which it opposes, as that these very words, which are a protest against any materialisation of the idea of altar and sacrifice, should have been twisted to mean by the altar the table of the Lord, and by sacrifice the communion of His body and blood. But so it is. So strong are the tendencies in our weak humanity to grasp at some sensuous embodiment of the truth that the Christian Church, as a whole, has not been able to keep on the lofty levels of my text, and has hungered after some external signs to which it may attach notions of efficacy which attach only to the spiritual sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Thus we have got a strange contradiction, as it seems to me, of the spirit and letter of my text, and of the whole Epistle from which it comes, and there has crept surreptitiously into, and been obstinately maintained in, large sections

of the Christian Church the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, and of a true sacrifice offered upon a material altar. My text protests against all that, and said to these early Christians what it says to us: 'Go into your upper rooms and there offer your worship, which to sense seems so bare and starved. Never mind though people say there is nothing in your system for sense to lay hold of. So much the better. Never mind though you can present no ritual with an altar, and a priest, and a sacrifice. All these are swept away for ever, because once Jesus Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Our temple is His body; our priest is before the throne. We rear no altar; He has died. Our sacrifice was offered on Calvary, and henceforward our worship, cleared from these materialities, rises unto loftier regions, and we worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh.'

Still further, this truth has a bearing on the opposite pole of error, on those who would fain have a Christianity without an altar. I am not going to say how far genuine discipleship of Jesus Christ is possible with the omission of this article from the creed. It is no business of mine to determine that, but it is my business, as I think, to assert this, that a Christianity without an altar is a Christianity without power; impotent to move the world or to control the individual heart, inadequate to meet the needs and the cravings of men. Where are the decaying Christians? Where are the Christians that have let go the central fact of an incarnate sacrifice for the world's sin? The answer to the two questions is the same. Wherever you find a feeble grasp of that central truth, or a faltering utterance of it on the part of the preachers, there you find deadness and formality.

Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ's servants, I was going to say, obey the same law, and that law is, no cross, no crown. If Christ has not died, the world's sacrifice, He will never reign, the world's King. If His Cross be an altar it is a throne. If it be not, it is merely a gallows, on which a religious enthusiast, with many sweet and lovable qualities, died a long time ago, and it is nothing to me. 'We have an altar,' or else we have no religion worth keeping.

II. Mark here, secondly, our feast on the sacrifice.

From this altar, says the writer, the adherents of the ancient system have no right to partake. That implies that those who have left the ancient system have the right to partake, and do partake. Now the writer is drawing a contrast, which he proceeds to elaborate, between the great sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. The former was not, as many other sacrifices were, partaken of by priests and worshippers, but simply the blood was brought within the holy place, and the whole of the rest of the sacrifice consumed in a waste spot without the camp. And this contrast is in the writer's mind. We have a sacrifice on which we feast. That is to say, the Christ who died for my sins is not only my means of reconciliation with God, but His sacrifice and death are the sustenance of my spiritual life. We live upon the Christ that died for us. That this is no mere metaphor, but goes penetratingly and deep down to the very basis of the spiritual life, is attested sufficiently by many a word of Scripture on which I cannot now dwell. The life of the Christian is the indwelling Christ. For he whose heart hath not received that Christ within him is dead whilst he lives, and has no possession of the

one true life for a human spirit, viz., the life of union with God. Christ in us is the consequence of Christ for us; and that Christianity is all imperfect which does not grasp with equal emphasis the thought of the sacrifice or the cross, and of the feast or the sacrifice.

But how is that feeding on the sacrifice accomplished? 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.' He that believeth, eateth. He that with humble faith makes Christ his very own, and appropriates as the nourishment and basis of his own better life the facts of the life and death of sacrifice, he truly lives thereby. To eat is to believe; to believe is to live.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how, though there be no reference in the words of my text, as I have tried to show, to the external rite of the communion of the Lord's body and blood, and though the 'altar' here has no reference whatever to that table, yet there is a connection between the two representations, inasmuch as the one declares in words what the other sets forth in symbol, and the meaning of the feast on the sacrifice is expressed by this great word. 'This is My body, broken for you.' 'This is the new covenant in My blood': 'Drink ye all of it.' 'We have an altar,' and though it be not the table on which the symbols of our Lord's sacrificial death are spread for us, yet these symbols and the words of my text, like the words of His great discourse in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, point to the same fact, that the spiritual participation of Christ by faith is the reality of 'eating of Him,' and the condition of living for ever.

III. And now, lastly, my text suggests our Christian offerings on the altar.

'By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' What are these offerings? Christ's death stands alone, incapable of repetition, meeting no repetition, the eternal, sole, 'sufficient obligation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' But there be other kinds of sacrifice. There are sacrifices of thanksgiving as well as for propitiation. And we, on the footing of that great sacrifice to which we can add nothing, and on which alone we must rest, may bring the offerings of our thankful hearts. These offerings are of a two-fold sort, says the writer. There are words of praise. There are works of beneficence. The service of man is sacrifice to God. That is a deep saying and reaches far. Such praise and such beneficence are only possible on the footing of Christ's sacrifice, for only on that footing is our praise acceptable; and only when moved by that infinite mercy and love shall we yield ourselves, thank-offerings to God.

And thus, brethren, the whole extent of the Christian life, in its inmost springs, and in its outward manifestations, is covered by these two thoughts — the feast on the sacrifice once offered, and the sacrifices which we in our turn offer on the altar. If we thus, moved by the mercy of God, 'yield ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service,' then not only will life be one long thank-offering, but as the Apostle puts it in another place, death itself may become, too, a thankful surrender to Him. For He says, 'I am ready to be offered.' And so the thankful heart, resting on the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, makes all life a thanksgiving, 'death God's endless mercy seals, and makes the sacrifice complete.' There is one Christ that can thus hallow and make

acceptable our living and our dying, and that is the Christ that has died for us, and lives that in Him we may be priests to God. There is only one Christianity that will do for us what we will need, and that is the Christianity whose centre is an altar, on which the Son of God, our Passover, is slain for us.

'WITHOUT THE CAMP'

'Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. 14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'—HEB. xiii. 13, 14.

CALVARY was outside Jerusalem. That wholly accidental and trivial circumstance is laid hold of in the context, in order to give picturesque force to the main contention and purpose of this Epistle. One of the solemn parts of the ritual of Judaism was the great Day of Atonement, on which the sacrifice that took away the sins of the nation was borne outside the camp, and consumed by fire, instead of being partaken of by the priests, as were most of the other sacrifices. Our writer here sees in these two roughly parallel things, not an argument but an imaginative illustration of great truths. Though he does not mean to say that the death on Calvary was intended to be pointed to by the unique arrangement in question, he does mean to say that the coincidence of the two things helps us to grasp two great truths—one, that Jesus Christ really did what that old sacrifice expressed the need for having done, and the other that, in His death on Calvary, the Jewish nation, as one of the parables has it, 'cast Him out of the vineyard.' In the context, he urges this analogy between the two things.

But a Christ outside the camp beckons His disciples to His side. If any man serve Him, he has to follow Him, and the blessedness, as well as the duty, of the servant on earth, as well as in heaven, is to be where his Master is. So the writer finds here a picturesque way to enforce the great lesson of his treatise, namely, that the Jewish adherent to Christianity must break with Judaism. In the early stages, it was possible to combine faith in Christ and adherence to the Temple and its ritual. But now that by process of time and experience the Church has learnt better who and what Christ is, that which was in part has to be done away, and the Christian Church is to stand clear of the Jewish synagogue.

Now it is to be distinctly understood that the words of my text, in the writer's intention, are not a general principle or exhortation, but that they are a special commandment to a certain class under special circumstances, and when we use them, as I am going to do now, for a wider purpose, we must remember that that wider purpose was by no means in the writer's mind. What he was thinking about was simply the relation between the Jewish Christian and the Jewish community. But if we take them as we may legitimately do — only remembering that we are diverting them from their original intention — as carrying more general lessons for us, what they seem to teach is that faithful discipleship involves detachment from the world. This commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp,' stands, if you will notice, between two reasons for it, which buttress it up, as it were, on either side. Before it is enunciated, the writer has been pointing, as I have tried to show, to the thought that a Christ without the camp necessarily

involves disciples without the camp. And he follows it with another reason, 'here we have no continuing city, but we seek that which is to come.' Here, then, is a general principle, supported on either side by a great reason.

Let me first try to set before you,

I. What this detachment is not.

The Jewish Christian was obliged utterly and outwardly to break his connection with Judaism, on the peril, if he did not, of being involved in its ruin, and, as was historically the case with certain Judaising sects, of losing his Christianity altogether. It was a cruel necessity, and no wonder that it needed this long letter to screw the disciples of Hebrew extraction up to the point of making the leap from the sinking ship to the deck of the one that floated. The parallel does not hold with regard to us. The detachment from the world, or the coming out from the camp, to which my text exhorts, is not the abandonment of our relations with what the Bible calls 'the world,' and what we call—roughly meaning the same thing—society. The function of the Christian Church as leaven, involves the necessity of being closely associated, and in contact with, all forms of human life, national, civic, domestic, social, commercial, intellectual, political. Does my text counsel an opposite course? 'Go forth without the camp,'—does that mean huddle yourself together into a separate flock, and let the camp go to the devil? By no means. For the society or world, out of which the Christian is drawn by the attraction of the Cross, like iron filings out of a heap by a magnet, is in itself good and God-appointed. It is He 'that sets the solitary in families.' It is He that gathers humanity into the bonds of civic and national

life. It is He that gives capacities which find their sphere, their education, and their increase in the walks of intellectual or commercial or political life. And He does not build up with one hand and destroy with the other, or set men by His providence in circumstances out of which He draws them by His grace. By no means. To go apart from humanity is to miss the very purpose for which God has set the Church in the world. For contact with the sick to be healed is requisite for healing, and they are poor disciples of the 'Friend of publicans and sinners' who prefer to consort with Pharisees. 'Let both grow together till the harvest'—the roots are intertwined, and it is God that has intertwined them.

Now, I know that one does not need to insist upon this principle to the average Christianity of this day, which is only too ready to mingle itself with the world, but one does need to insist that, in so mingling, detachment from the world is still to be observed; and it does need to be taught that Christian men are not lowering the standard of the Christian life, when they fling themselves frankly and energetically into the various forms of human activity, if and only if, whilst they do so, they still remember and obey the commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp.' The commandment misinterpreted so as to be absolutely impossible to be obeyed, becomes a snare to people who do not keep it, and yet sometimes feel as if they were to blame, because they do not. And, therefore, I turn in the next place to consider—

II. What this detachment really is.

Will you let me put what I have to say into the shape of two or three plain, practical exhortations, not because I wish to assume a position of authority or command,

but only in order to give vividness and point to my thoughts?

First, then, let us habitually nourish the inner life of union with Jesus Christ. Notice the words of my text, and see what comes first and what comes second. 'Let us go forth unto Him'—that is the main thing: 'Without the camp' is second, and a consequence; 'unto Him,' is primary, which is just to say that the highest, widest, noblest, all-comprehensive conception of what a Christian life is, is that it is union with Jesus Christ, and whatever else it is follows from that. The soul is ever to be looking up through all the shadows and shows, the changes and circumstances, of this fleeting present unto Him, and seeking to be more closely united with Him. Union with Him is life, and separation from Him is death. To be so united is to be a Christian. Never mind about camps or anything else, to begin with. If the heart is joined to Jesus, then all the rest will come right. If it is not, then you may make regulations as many as you like, and they will only be red tape to entangle your feet in. 'Let us go forth unto Him'; that is the sovereign commandment. And how is that to be done? How is it to be done but by nourishing habitual consciousness of union with Him and life in Him, by an habitual reference of all our acts to Him? As the Roman Catholics put it, in their hard external way, 'the practice of the presence of God' is the keynote to all real, vigorous Christianity. For, brethren, such an habitual fellowship with Jesus Christ is possible for us. Though with many interruptions, no doubt, still ideally is it possible that it shall be continuous and real. It is possible, perfectly possible, that it shall be a great deal more continuous than, alas! it is with many of us.

Depend upon it, this nourishing of an inward life of fellowship with Jesus, so that we may say, 'our lives are hid'—hid, after all vigorous manifestation and consistent action—'with Christ in God,' will not weaken, but increase, the force with which we act on the things seen and temporal. There is an unwholesome kind of mysticism which withdraws men from the plain duties of everyday life; and there is a deep, sane, wholesome, and eminently Christian mysticism which enables men to come down with greater force, and to act with more decision, with more energy, with more effect, in all the common deeds of life. The greatest mystics have been the hardest workers. Who was it that said, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'? That man had gone far, very far, towards an habitual consciousness of Christ's presence, and it was the same man that said, 'That which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches.' The greatest mystic of the Middle Ages, the saint that rode by the lake all day long, and was so absorbed in contemplation that he said at night, 'Where is the lake?' was the man that held all the threads of European politics in his hands, and from his cell at Clairvaux guided popes, and flung the nations of the West into a crusade. John Wesley was one of the hardest workers that the Church has ever had, and was one of those who lived most habitually without the camp. Be sure of this, that the more our lives are wrapped in Christ, the more energetic will they be in the world. They tell us that the branches of a spreading tree describe roughly the same circumference in the atmosphere that its roots do underground, and so far as our roots extend in Christ, so far will our branches spread in the world. 'Let us go forth unto Him, without the camp.'

Again, let me say, do the same things as other people, but with a difference. The more our so-called civilisation advances, the more, I was going to say, mechanical, or at least largely released from the control of the will and personal idiosyncrasy, become great parts of our work. The Christian weaver drives her looms very much in the same fashion that the non-Christian girl who is looking after the next set does. The Christian clerk adds up his figures, and writes his letters, very much in the same fashion that the worldly clerk does. The believing doctor visits his patients, and writes out his prescriptions in the fashion that his neighbour who is not a Christian does. But there is always room for the personal equation—always! and two lives may be, superficially and roughly, the same, and yet there may be a difference in them impalpable, undefinable, but very obvious and very real and very mighty. The Christian motive is love to Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him, and that motive may be brought to bear upon all life—

> 'A servant with this clause
> Makes drudgery divine.'

He that for Christ's sake does a common thing lifts it out of the fatal region of the commonplace, and makes it great and beautiful. We do not want from all Christian people specifically Christian service, in the narrow sense which that phrase has acquired, half so much as we want common things done from an uncommon motive; worldly things done because of the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts. And, depend upon it, just as, from some unseen bank of violets, there come odours in opening spring, so from the unspoken and deeply hidden motive of love to Jesus Christ, there will be a fragrance in our commonest actions which all men

will recognise. They tell us that rivers which flow from lakes are so clear that they are tinged throughout with celestial blue, because all the mud that they brought down from their upper reaches has been deposited in the still waters of the lake from which they flow; and if from the deep tarn of love to Jesus Christ in our hearts the stream of our lives flows out, it will be like the Rhone below Geneva, distinguishable from the muddy waters that run by its side in the same channel. Two people, partners in business, joined in the same work, marching step for step in the same ranks, may yet be entirely distinguishable and truly separate, because, doing the same things, they do them from different motives.

Let me say, still further, and finally about this matter, that sometimes we shall have to come actually out of the camp. The world as God made it is good; society is ordained by God. The occupations which men pursue are of His appointment, for the most part. But into the thing that was good there have crept all manner of corruptions and abominations, so that often it will be a Christian duty to come away from all outward connection with that which is incurably corrupt. I know very well that a morality which mainly consists of prohibitions is pedantic and poor. I know very well that a Christianity which interprets such a precept as this of my text simply as meaning abstinence from certain conventionally selected and branded forms of life, occupation, or amusement, is but a very poor affair. But 'Thou shalt not' is very often absolutely necessary as a support to 'Thou shalt.' If you go into an Eastern city, you will find the houses with their fronts to the street, having narrow slits of windows all barred, and a heavy gate, frowning and

ugly. But pass within, and there are flower-beds and fountains. The frowning street front is there for the defence of the fountains and the flower-beds within, from the assaults of foes, and speaks of a disturbed state of society, in which no flowers can grow and no fountains can bubble and sparkle, unless a strong barrier is round them. And so 'thou shalt not,' in a world like this, is needful in order that 'thou shalt' shall have fair play. No law can be laid down for other people. Every man must settle this matter of abstinence for himself. Things that you may do, perhaps I may not do; things that you may not do, I very likely may. 'A liberal Christianity,' as the world calls it, is often a very shallow Christianity. 'A sour Puritanical severity,' as loose-living men call it, is very often plain, Christian morality. An inconsistent Christian may be hailed as 'a good fellow,' and laughed at behind his back. Samson made sport for the Philistines when he was blind. The uncircumcised do often say of professing Christians, that try to be like them, and to keep step with them, 'What do these Hebrews here?' and God always says to such, 'What dost thou here, Elijah?'

Lastly—

III. Why this detachment is enforced.

'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' That translation does not give the full force of the original, for it suggests the idea of a vague uncertainty in the seeking, whereas what the writer means is, not 'one to come,' but *one which is coming.* The Christian object of seeking is definite, and it is not merely future but present, and in process of being realised even here and now, and tending to completion. Paul uses the same metaphor of the city in

one of his letters, 'Your citizenship is in heaven.' He says that to the Philippians. Philippi was a colony; that is to say, it was a bit of Rome put down in a foreign land, with Roman laws, its citizens enrolled upon the registers of the Roman tribes, and not under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor. That is what we Christians are, whether we know it or not. We are here in an order to which we outwardly belong, but in the depths of our being we belong to another order of things altogether. Therefore the essentials of the Christian life may be stated as being the looking forward to the city, and the realising of our affinities to it and not to the things around us. In the measure in which, dear brethren, we realise to what community we belong, will the things here be seen to be fleeting and alive to our deepest selves. 'Here we have no continuing city' is not merely the result of the transiency of temporal things, and the brevity of our earthly lives, but it is much rather the result of our affinity to the other order of things beyond the seas.

Abraham dwelt in tents, because he 'looked for a city,' and so it was better for him to stop on the breezy uplands, though the herbage was scant, than to go with Lot into the vale of Sodom, though it looked like the garden of the Lord. In like manner, the more intensely we realise that we belong to the city, the more shall we be willing to 'go forth without the camp.' Let these two thoughts dominate our minds and shape our lives; our union with Jesus Christ and our citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the measure in which they do, it will be no sacrifice for us to come out of the transient camp, because we shall thereby go to Him and come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, 'which hath the foundations.'

THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE

'By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. 16. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'—HEB. xiii. 15, 16.

MUCH attention is given now to the study of comparative religion. The beliefs and observances of the rudest tribes are narrowly scrutinised, in order to discover the underlying ideas. And many a practice which seems to be trivial, absurd, or sanguinary is found to have its foundation in some noble and profound thought. Charity and insight have both gained by the study.

But, singularly enough, the very people who are so interested in the *rationale* of the rites of savages will turn away when anybody applies a similar process to the ritual of the Jews. That is what this Epistle to the Hebrews does. It translates altar, ritual festivals, priests, into thoughts; and it declares that Jesus Christ is the only adequate and abiding embodiment of these thoughts. We are not dressing Christian truth in a foreign garb when we express the substance of its revelation in language borrowed from the ritualistic system that preceded it. But we are extricating truths, which the world needs to-day as much as ever it did, from the form in which they were embodied for one stage of religion, when we translate them into their Christian equivalents.

So the writer here has been speaking about Christ as by His death sanctifying His people. And on that great thought, that He is what all priesthood symbolises, and what all bloody sacrifices reach out towards, he builds this grand exhortation of my text,

which is at once a lofty conception of what the Christian life ought to be, and a directory as to the method by which it may become so. 'By Him let us offer sacrifices continually, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'

Now, it seems to me that there are here mainly three points to be looked at. First, the basis of; second, the material of; and third, the divine delight in, the sacrifices of the Christian life. And to these three points I ask your attention.

I. First, then, note here the emphatic way in which the one basis of Christian sacrifice is laid down.

Anybody who can consult the original will see, what indeed is partially expressed in our translation, that the position of these two words 'through' (or by) 'Him' underscores and puts great emphasis upon them. There are two thoughts which may be included in them; the one, that Jesus is the Priest by whose mediation we come to God, and the other that He is the sacrifice, on the footing of which we can present our sacrifices. It seems to me, however, that it is the latter idea principally that is in the writer's mind here. And on it I touch lightly in a few words.

Now, let me recall to you, as a world-wide fact which is expressed in the noblest form in the ancient Jewish ritual, that there was a broad line of distinction drawn between two kinds of sacrifices, differing in their material and in their purpose. If I wanted to use mere theological technicalities, which I do not, I should talk about the difference between sacrifices of propitiation and sacrifices of thanksgiving. But let us put these well-worn phrases on one side, as far as

we can, for the moment. Here, then, is the fact that all the world over, and in the Mosaic ritual, there was expressed a double consciousness — one, that there was, somehow or other, a black dam between the worshipper and his Deity, which needed to be swept away; and the other, that when that barrier was removed there could be an uninterrupted flow of thanksgiving and of service. So on one altar was laid a bleeding victim, and on another were spread the flowers of the field, the fruits of the earth, all things gracious, lovely, fair, and sweet, as expressions of the thankfulness of the reconciled worshippers. One set of sacrifices expressed the consciousness of sin; the other expressed the joyful recognition of its removal.

Now I want to know whether that world-wide confession of need is nothing more to us than a mere piece of interesting reminiscence of a stage of development beyond which we have advanced. I do not believe that there is such a gulf of difference between the lowest savage and the most cultivated nineteenth-century Englishman, that the fundamental needs of the one, in spirit, are not almost as identical as are the fundamental needs of the one and the other in regard to bodily wants. And sure I am that, if the voice of humanity has declared all the world over, as it has declared, that it is conscious of a cloud that has come between it and the awful Power above, and that it seeks by sacrifice the removal of the cloud, the probability is that that need is your need and mine; and that the remedy which humanity has divined as necessary has some affinity with the remedy which God has revealed as provided.

I am not going to attempt theorising about the manner in which the life and death of Jesus Christ

sweep away the barrier between us and God, and deal with the consciousness of transgression, which lies coiled and dormant, but always ready to wake and sting, in human hearts. But I do venture to appeal to each man's and woman's own consciousness, and to ask, Is there not something in us which recognises the necessity that the sin which stands between God and man shall be swept away? Is there not something in us which recognises the blessedness of the message, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin'? Oh, brethren! do not fancy that it is a mere theological doctrine of an atonement that is in question. It is the possibility of loving access to God, as made possible through Jesus, and through Him alone, that I want to press upon your hearts. 'Through Him let us offer.'

II. Secondly, notice the light which our text throws upon the material or contents of the Christian sacrifice.

I need not dwell at all, I suppose, upon the explanation of the words, which are plain enough. The writer seems to me to divide the sacrifice of praise, which he prescribes, into two parts, the praise of the lip and the praise of the life.

But before I deal with this twofold distribution of the thought, let me fix upon the main general idea that is expressed here, and that is that the highest notion, the noblest and purest of what a Christian life is, is that it is one long sacrifice. Have we risen to the height of that conception? I do not say, Have we attained to the fulfilment of it? The answer to the latter question one knows only too well. But has it ever dawned upon us that the true ideal of the Christian life which we profess to be living is this—a sacrifice?

Now, that thought involves two things. One is the continuous surrender of self, and that means the absolute suppression of our own wills; the bridling of our own inclinations and fancies; the ceasing obstinately to adhere to our own purposes and conceptions of what is good; the recognition that there is a higher will above us, ruling and guiding, to which we are to submit. Sacrifice means nothing if it does not mean surrender; and surrender is nothing if it is not the surrender of the will. It was a great deal easier for Abraham to take the knife in his hand, and climb the hill with the fixed intention of thrusting it into his son's heart, than it is for us to take the sword of the Spirit in our hands and slay our own wills, and I am here to say that unless we do we have very little right to call ourselves Christians.

But, then, surrender is only half the conception of the sacrifice which has to be accomplished in our whole days and selves. Surrender to God is the full meaning of sacrifice. And that implies the distinct reference of all that I am, and all that I do, to Him, as not only commanding, but as being the aim and end of my life. We are to labour on as at His command. You in your counting-houses, and mills, and shops, and homes; and we students in our studies, and laboratories, and lecture-rooms, are to link everything with Him, with His will, and with the thought of Him. What vice could live in that light? What meanness would not be struck dead if we were connected with that great reservoir of electric force? What slothfulness would not be spurred into unhasting and unresting zeal if all our work were referred to God? Unless our lives be thus sacrifice, in the full sense of conscious surrender to Him, we have yet to learn what is the

meaning and the purpose of the propitiatory sacrifice on which we say that our lives are built.

I need not, I suppose, remind you at any length of how our text draws broad and deep the distinction between the nature and the scope of the fundamental offering made by Christ, and the offerings made by us. The one takes away the separating barrier; the other is the flow of the stream where the barrier had stood. The one is the melting away of the cloud that hid the sun; the other is the flashing of the mirror of my heart when the sun shines upon it. Our sacrifice is thanksgiving. Then there will be no reluctance because duty is heavy. There will be no grudging because requirements are great. There will be no avoiding of the obligations of the Christian life, and rendering as small a percentage by way of dividend as the Creditor up in the heavens will accept. If the offering is a thank-offering, then it will be given gladly. The grateful heart does not hold the scales like a scrupulous retail dealer afraid of putting the thousandth part of an ounce more in than can be avoided.

> 'Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely calculated less or more.'

Power is the measure of duty, and they whose offering is the expression of their thankfulness will heap incense upon the brazier, and cover the altar with flowers.

Ah, brethren, what a blessed life it would be for us, if indeed all the painfulness and harshness of duty, with all the efforts of constraint and restriction and stimulus which it so often requires, were transmuted into that glad expression of infinite obligation for the great sacrifice on which our life and hopes rest!

I do not purpose to say much about the two classes

of sacrifice into which our writer divides the whole. Words come first, work follows. That order may seem strange, because we are accustomed to think more of work than words. But the Bible has a solemn reverence for man's utterances of speech, and many a protest against 'God's great gift of speech abused.' And the text rightly supposes that if there is in us any deep, real, abiding, life-shaping thankfulness for the gift of Jesus Christ, it is impossible that our tongues should cleave to the roofs of our mouths, and that we should be contented to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. What would you think of a husband who never felt any impulse to tell his wife that she was dear to him; or a mother who never found it needful to unpack her heart of its tenderness, even in perhaps inarticulate croonings over the little child that she pressed to her heart? It seems to me that a dumb Christian, a man who is thankful for Christ's sacrifice and never feels the need to say so, is as great an anomaly as either of these I have described.

Brethren! the conventionalities of our modern life, the proper reticence about personal experience, the reverence due to sacred subjects, all these do prescribe caution and tact and many another thing, in limiting the evangelistic side of our speech; but is there any such limitation needful for the eucharistic, the thanksgiving side of our speech? Surely not. In some monasteries and nunneries there used to be a provision made that at every hour of the four and twenty, and at every moment of every hour, there should be one kneeling figure before the altar, repeating the psalter, so that night and day prayer and praise went up. It was a beautiful idea, beautiful as long as it was an idea, and, like a great many other beautiful

ideas, made vulgar and sometimes ludicrous when it was put into realisation. But it is the symbol of what we should be, with hearts ever occupied with Him, and the voice of praise rising unintermittently from our hearts singing a quiet tune, all the day and night long, to Him who has loved us and given Himself for us.

And then the other side of this conception of sacrifice that my text puts forth is that of beneficence amongst men, in the general form of doing good, and in the specific form of giving money. Two aspects of this combination of word and work may be suggested. It has a message for us professing Christians. All that the world says about the uselessness of singing psalms, and praying prayers, while neglecting the miserable and the weak, is said far more emphatically in the Bible, and ought to be laid to heart, not because sneering, godless people say it, but because God Himself says it. It is vain to pray unless you work. It is sin to work for yourselves unless you own the bond of sympathy with all mankind, and live 'to do good and to communicate.' That is a message for others than Christians. There is no real foundation for a broad philanthropy except a deep devotion to God. The service of man is never so well secured as when it is the corollary and second form of the service of God.

III. And so, lastly—and only a word—note the divine delight in such sacrifice.

Ah! that is a wonderful thought, 'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Now I take it that that 'such' covers both the points on which I have been dwelling, and that the sacrifices which please Him are, first, those which are offered on the basis and

footing of Christ's sacrifice, and, second, those in which word and work accord well, and make one music. 'With *such* sacrifices God is well pleased.'

We are sometimes too much afraid of believing that there is in the divine heart anything corresponding to our delight in gifts that mean love, because we are so penetrated with the imperfection of all that we can do and give; and sometimes because we are influenced by grand philosophic ideas of the divine nature, so that we think it degrading to Him to conceive of anything corresponding to our delight passing across it. But the Bible is wiser and more reverent than that, and it tells us that, however stained and imperfect our gifts, and however a man might reject them with scorn, God will take them if they are '*such*' —that is, offered through Jesus Christ. I dare say there are many parents who have laid away amongst their treasures some utterly useless thing that one of their little children once gave them. No good in it at all! No; but it meant love. And, depend upon it, 'if ye, being evil, know how to *take* good gifts'—though they are useless—'from your children, much more will your heavenly Father accept' your stained sacrifices if they come through Christ.

Dear brethren, my text preaches to us what is the true sacrifice of the true priesthood in the Christian Church. There is one Priest who stands alone, offering the one sacrifice that has no parallel nor second. No other shares in His priesthood of expiation and intercession. But around, and deriving their priestly character from Him, and made capable of rendering acceptable sacrifices through Him, stand the whole company of Christian people. And besides these

there are no priesthoods and no sacrifices in the Christian vocabulary or in the Christian Church. Would that a generation that seems to be reeling backwards to the beggarly elements of an official priesthood, with all its corruptions and degradations of the Christian community, would learn the lesson of my text! 'Ye'—all of you, and not any selected number amongst you—'ye, all of you are a royal priesthood.' There are only two sacrifices in the Christian Church: the one offered once for all on Calvary, by the High Priest Himself; the sacrifice of ourselves, by ourselves, thank-offerings for Christ and His name, which are the true Eucharist.

GREAT HOPES A GREAT DUTY

'The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.'—HEB. xiii. 20.

A GREAT building needs a deep foundation; a leaping fountain needs a full spring. A very large and lofty prayer follows the words of my text, and these are the foundations on which it rests, the abundant source from which it soars heavenward. The writer asks for his readers nothing less than a complete, all-round, and thorough-going conformity to the will of God; and that should be our deepest desire and our conscious aim, that God may see His own image in us, for nothing less can be 'well-pleasing in His sight.' But does not such a dream of what we may be seem far too audacious, when we pursue the stained volume of our own lives, and remember what we are? Should we not be content with very much more modest hopes for ourselves, and with a vary partial attainment of them? Yes, if we look at ourselves; but to look at

ourselves is not the way to pray, or the way to hope, or the way to grow, or the way to dare. The logic of Christian petitions and Christian expectations starts with God as the premiss, and thence argues the possibility of the impossible. It was because of all this great accumulation of truths, piled up in my text, that the writer found it in his heart to ask such great things for the humble people to whom he was writing, although he well knew that they were far from perfect, and were even in danger of making shipwreck of the faith altogether. My purpose now is to let him lead us along the great array of reasons for his great prayer, that we too may learn to desire and to expect, and to work for nothing short of this aim—the entire purging of ourselves from all evil and sin and the complete assimilation to our Lord. There are three points here: the warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God; the warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd; the warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

I. The warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God.

'The God of peace'—the name comes like a benediction into our restless lives and distracted hearts, and carries us away up into lofty regions, above the mutations of circumstances and the perturbations and agitations of our earthly life. No doubt, there may be some allusion here to the special circumstances of the recipients of this letter, for it is clear from the rest of the Epistle that they had much need for the peace of God to calm their agitations in the prospect of the collapse of the venerable system in which they had lived so long. It is obvious also that there were divisions of opinion amongst themselves, so that the

invocation of the God of peace may have had a special sanctity and sweetness to them, considering the circumstances in which they were placed. But the designation has a bearing not so much on the condition of those to whom the words are spoken, as upon the substance of the grand prayer that follows it. It is because He is known to us as being 'the God of peace' that we may be quite sure that He will 'make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

And how does that great name, sweet and strong as it is, bear with it the weight of such an inference as that? Plainly enough because it speaks, first of all, of that which I may call an immanent characteristic of the divine nature. He is the tranquil God, dwelling above all disturbance which comes from variableness and all 'the shadows cast by turning'; dwelling above all possibilities of irritation or agitation. And yet that great ocean is not stagnant, but through all its depths flow currents of love, and in all its repose is intensest energy. The highest activity coincides with the supremest rest. The wheel revolves so swiftly that it stands as if motionless.

Then, just because of that profound divine repose, we may expect Him, by His very nature, to impart His own peace to the soul that seeks Him. Of course, it can be but the faintest shadow of that divine indisturbance which can ever fall, like a dove's wing, upon our restless lives. But still in the tranquillity of a quiet heart, in the harmonies of a spirit all concentrated on one purpose, in the independence of externals possible to a man who grasps God, in the victory over change which is granted to them who have pierced through the fleeting clouds and have their home in the

calm blue beyond, there may be a quiet of heart which does not altogether put to shame that wondrous promise: 'My peace I give unto you.' It is possible that they 'which have believed' should 'enter into the rest' of God.

But if the impartation of some faint but real echo of His own great repose is the delight of the divine heart, how can it be done? There is only one way by which a man can be made peaceful, and that is by his being made good. Nothing else secures the true tranquillity of a human spirit without its conformity to the divine will. It is submission to the divine commandments and appointments, it is the casting-off of self with all its agitations and troubles, that secures our entering into rest. What a man needs for peace is, that his relations with God should be set right, that his own nature should be drawn into one and harmonised with itself, and that his relations with men should also be rectified.

For the first of these, we know that it is 'the Christ that died,' who is the means by which the alienation and enmity of heart between us and God can be swept away. For the second of them, we know that the only way by which this anarchic commonwealth within can be brought into harmony and order, and its elements prevented from drawing apart from one another, is that the whole man shall be bowed before God in submission to His will. The heart is like some stormy sea, tossed and running mountains high, and there is only one voice that can say to it, 'Peace: be still,' and that is the voice of God in Christ. There is only one power that, like the white moon in the nightly sky, can draw the heaped waters round the whole world after itself, and that is the power of Christ in His Cross and Spirit,

which brings the disobedient heart into submission, and unites the discordant powers in the liberty of a common service: so, brethren, if we are ever to have quiet hearts, they must come, not from favourable circumstances, nor from anything external. They can only come from the prayer being answered, 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' and then our inner lives will no longer be torn by contending passions—conscience pulling this way and desire that; a great voice saying within, 'you ought!' and an insistent voice answering, 'I will not'; but all within will be at one, and then there will be peace. 'The God of peace sanctify you wholly,' says one of the apostles, bringing out in the expression the same thought, that inasmuch as He who Himself is supreme repose must be infinitely desirous that we, His children, should share in His rest, He will, as the only way by which that rest can ever be attained, sanctify us wholly. When—and not till, and as soon as—we are thus made holy are we made at rest.

Nor let us forget that, on the other hand, the divine peace, which is 'shed abroad in our hearts' by the love of God, does itself largely contribute to perfect the holiness of a Christian soul. We read that 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,' and also that 'the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds,' and again that the peace of God will sit as umpire in our hearts, detecting evil, judging actions, awarding the prizes. For, indeed, when that peace lies like a summer morning's light upon our quiet hearts, there will be little in evil that will so attract us as to make us think it worth our while to break the blessed and charmed silence for the sake of any earthly influences or joys. They that

dwell in the peace of God have little temptation to buy trouble, remorse perhaps, or agitation, by venturing out into the forbidden ground. So, brethren, the great name of the God of peace is itself a promise, and entitles us to expect the completeness of character which alone brings peace.

Then, further, we have here

II. The warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd.

'The God of peace who brought again'—or, perhaps, brought up—'from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.' Now, it is remarkable that this is the only reference in this Epistle to the Hebrews to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is full of references to that which presupposes the Resurrection, namely, the ascended life of Jesus as the great High Priest within the veil, and the fact that only this once is the act of resurrection referred to, confirms the idea, that in the New Testament there is no division of thought between the point at which the line begins and the line itself, that the Ascension is but the prolongation of the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is but the beginning of the Ascension. But here the act, rather than the state into which it led, is dwelt upon as being more appropriate to the purpose in hand.

Then we may notice further, that in that phrase, 'the great Shepherd of the sheep,' there is a quotation from one of the prophets, where the words refer to Moses bringing up the people from the Red Sea. The writer of the Epistle adds to Isaiah's phrase one significant word, and speaks of 'that *great* Shepherd,' to remind us of the comparison which he had been

running in an earlier part of the letter, between the leader of Israel and Christ.

So, then, we have here brought before us Jesus who is risen and ascended, as the great Shepherd of the sheep. Looking to Him, what are we heartened to believe are the possibilities and the divine purposes for each of those that put their trust in Him? Gazing in thought for a moment on that Lord risen from the grave, with the old love in His heart, and the old greetings upon His lips, we see there, of course, as everybody knows, the demonstration of the persistence of a human life through death, like some stream of fresh water holding on its course through a salt and stagnant sea, or plunging underground for a short space, to come up again flashing into the sunshine. But we see more than that. We see the measure of the power, as the Apostle has it, that works in us, 'according to the energy of the might of the power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.' As we gaze, we see what may be called a type, but what is a great deal more than a type, of the possibilities of the risen life, as it may be lived even here and now, by every poor and humble soul that puts its trust in Him. The Resurrection of Jesus gives us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

But more than that, the risen Shepherd has risen as Shepherd, for the very purpose of imparting, to every soul that trusts in Him, His own life. And unless we grasp that truth, we shall not understand the place of the Resurrection in the Christian scheme, nor the ground on which the loftiest anticipations are not audacious for the poorest soul, and on which anything beneath the loftiest is, for the poorest, beneath what

it might and should aspire to. When the alabaster box was broken, the ointment was poured forth and the house was filled with the odour. The risen Christ imparts His life to His people. And nothing short of their entire perfecting in all which is within the possibilities of human beauty and nobleness and purity, will be the adequate issue of that great death and triumphant Resurrection, and of the mighty, quickening power of a new life, which He thereby breathed into the dying world. On His Cross, and from His Tomb, and from His Throne, He has set agoing processes which never can reach their goal—and, blessed be God! never will stop their beneficent working—until every soul of man, however stained and evil, that puts the humblest trust in Him, and lives after His commandment, is become radiant with beauty, complete in holiness, victorious over self and sin, and is set for ever more at the right hand of God. Every anticipation that falls short of that, and all effort that lags behind that anticipation, is an insult to the Christ, and a trampling under foot of the blood of 'the covenant wherewith ye are sanctified.'

So, brother, open your mouth wide, and it will be filled. Expect great things; believe that what Jesus Christ came into the world and died to do, what Jesus Christ left the world and lives to carry on, will be done in you, and that you too will be made complete in Him. For the Shepherd leads and the sheep follow—here afar off, often straying, and getting lost or torn by the brambles, and worried by the wolves. But He leads and they do follow, and the time comes when 'they shall follow the Lamb *whithersoever* He goeth,' and be close behind Him in all the good pastures of the mountains of Israel. 'We see not yet

all things put under Him,' but we see Jesus and that is enough.

III. The warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

Space will not allow of my entering upon the question as to the precise relation of these final words to the rest of the verse, but their relation to the great purpose of the whole verse is plain enough. It has come to be very unfashionable nowadays to talk about the covenant. People think that it is archaic, technically theological, far away from daily life, and so on and so on. I believe that Christian people would be a great deal stronger, if there were a more prominent place given in Christian meditations to the great idea that underlies that metaphor. And it is just this, that God is under obligations, taken on Him by Himself, to fulfil to a poor, trusting soul the great promises to which that soul has been drawn to cleave. He has, if I might use such a metaphor, like some monarch, given a constitution to His people. He has not left us to grope as to what His mind and purpose may be. Across the infinite ocean of possibilities, He has marked out on the chart, so to speak, the line which He will pursue. We have His word, and His word is this: 'After those days, saith the Lord, I will make a new covenant. I will write My law on their inward parts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' So the definite, distinct promise, in black and white, so to speak, to every man and woman on the face of the earth, is 'Come into the bonds of the covenant, by trusting Me, and you will get all that I have promised.'

And that covenant is, as my text says, sealed by 'the blood.' Which, being turned into less meta-

phorical English, is just this, that God's infinite propension of beneficence towards each of us, and desire to clothe us in garments of radiant purity, are, by Christ's death, guaranteed as extending to, and working their effects on, every soul that trusts Him. What does that death mean if it does not mean that? Why should He have died on the Cross, unless it were to take away sin?

But the blood of the covenant does not mean only the death by which the covenant is ratified. We shall much misapprehend and narrow New Testament teaching, if we suppose that. The 'blood is the life.' There is further suggested, then, by the expression, that the vital energy, with which Jesus Christ came from the dead as the Shepherd of the sheep, is the power by which God makes us 'perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

So, two practical counsels may close my words. See that you aspire as high as God's purpose concerning you, and do not be content with anything short of the, at least, incipient and progressive accomplishment in your characters and lives, of that great prayer. Again, see that you use the forces which, by the Cross and the Resurrection and the Ascension, are set in motion to make that wondrous possibility a matter-of-fact reality for each of us; and whoever you are, and whatever you have been, be sure of this, that He can lift you from the mud and cleanse you from its stains, and set you at His own right hand in the heavenly places. For the name, and the risen Shepherd, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, make a threefold cord, not to be quickly broken, and able to bear the weight of the loftiest hopes and firmest confidence that we can hang upon it.

THE GREAT PRAYER BASED ON GREAT PLEAS

Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'—HEB. xiii. 21.

MASSIVE foundations prognosticate a great building. We do not dig deep, and lay large blocks, in order to rear some flimsy structure. We have seen, in a previous sermon, how the words preceding my text bring out certain great aspects of the divine character and work, and now we have to turn to the great prayer which is based upon these. It is a prophecy as well as a prayer; for such a contemplation of what God is and does makes certain the fulfilment of the desires which the contemplation excites. Small petitions to a great God are insults. He is 'the God of peace,' therefore we may ask Him to 'make us perfect,' and be sure that He will. He is the God 'that brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,' therefore we may ask Him and be sure. He is the God who has sealed an 'everlasting covenant' with us by the blood of the Shepherd, therefore we may ask Him and be sure.

This prayer is the parting highest wish of the writer for his friends. Do *our* desires for ourselves, and for those whom we would seek to bless, run in the same mould? How strange it is that Christian people, who believe in the God whom the previous verse sets before us, so imperfectly and languidly cherish the confidence which inspires desires, for themselves and their brethren, such as those of our text this morning! Let us look at these great petitions, then, in the light of the great name on which they are based.

I. And, first, I ask you to consider the prayer which the name excites.

'Make you perfect in every good work.' Now, I need only observe here, in regard to the language of the petition, that the word translated 'make perfect' is not the ordinary one employed for that idea, but a somewhat remarkable one, with a very rich and pregnant variety of significance. For instance, it is employed to describe the action of the fisherman apostles in *mending* their nets. It is employed to describe the divine action which 'by faith we understand' when He '*made* the worlds.' It is employed to describe the action which the Apostle commends to one of his churches when he bids them '*restore* such an one in the spirit of meekness.' It is the condition which he described when he desired another of his churches to be 'perfectly *joined together*, in one mind and in one judgment.' It is still again the expression employed when he speaks of '*filling up*,' or 'perfecting that which is lacking in their faith.' The general idea of the word, then, is to make sound, or fit, or complete, by *restoring*, by *mending*, by *filling up* what is lacking, and by *adapting* all together in harmonious co-operation. And so this is what Christians ought to look for, and to desire as being the will of God concerning them. The writer goes on to still further deepen the idea when he says, 'make you perfect in every good work': where the word *work* is a supplement, and unnecessarily limits the idea of the text. For that applies much rather to character than to work, and the 'make you perfect in every good' refers rather to an inward process than to any outward manifestation. And this character, thus harmonised, corrected, restored, filled up where it is lacking, and

that in regard of all manner of good—'whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and of good report'—that character is 'well-pleasing to God.'

So, brethren, you see the width of the hopes—ay! of the confidence—that you and I ought to cherish. We should expect that all the discord of our nature shall be changed into a harmonious co-operation of all its parts towards one great end. We bear about within us a warning anarchy and tumultuous chaos, where solid and fluid, warm and cold, light and dark, calm and storm, contend. Is there any power that can harmonise this divided nature of ours, where lusts and passions, and inclinations of all sorts, drag one away, and duty draws another, so as that a man is torn apart as it were by wild horses? There is one. 'The worlds' were harmonised, adapted, and framed together, and chaos turned into order and beauty, and the God of Peace will come and do that for us, if we will let Him, so that the long schism which affects our natures, and makes us say sometimes, 'I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind.' 'Oh! wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' may be changed into perfect harmony, and the 'bear shall eat straw like the ox, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb; and a little child shall lead them'—the meekness of a patient love bridling all their ravening passions. It is possible that our hearts may be united to fear His name; and that one unbroken temper of whole-spirited submission may be ours.

Again, we should expect, and desire, and strive towards the correction of all that is wrong, the mending of the nets, the restoring of the havoc wrought in legitimate occupations and by any other cause. Again,

we may strive with hope and confidence towards the supply of all that is lacking. 'In every good'—an all-round completeness of excellence ought to be the hope, and the aim, as well as the prayer, of every Christian. Of course our various perfectings will be various. 'Star differeth from star in glory,' and the new man in many respects follows the lines of the old man, and temperament is permanent. But still, whilst all that is true, and while each shall ray back the divine light and radiance at a different angle, and so with a different hue from that which his neighbour, standing beside him, may catch and reflect, on the other hand the gospel is given to us to correct temperament, and to make the most uncongenial types of grace and excellence ours. It is meant to make it possible that men should 'gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles'; and to correct and fill up what is wrong and what is defective in our natural dispositions, so as that the passionate man may be made meek, and the hesitating man may be made prompt, and the animal man may be sublimed into spirit, and all that is proper to my peculiar constitution and character may be curbed and limited, and much that is not congenial to it may be appropriated and made mine. We are all apt to grow one-sided Christians, and it is our business to try to make ours the things that are lacking in our faith, and to supplement, by the grace of God working in our hearts, the defects of our qualities and the failures of our disposition and temperament. Do not grow like a tree stuck in the middle of a shrubbery, which has only space to put forth branches on one side, and is all lop-sided and awry; but like some symmetrical growth out in the open, equal all round the strong bole, and rising in perfect completeness of harmonious

beauty to the topmost twig that looks up to the sky. God means to make us 'perfect in every good'; to harmonise, to correct, to restore, to perfect us, that we, having all grace, may abound in all good to His glory.

Such is His purpose. Ah, brethren! has not the recognition of that as His purpose alarmingly died out of our minds; and do we live up to the height of this prayer? I would that we should all remember more, as defining our aims, and animating our courage, and directing our hopes, that 'this is the will of God, even our sanctification'; and that, when faith is dim, and effort burns low, and we are ready to put all such hopes away as a fair dream, we might be stirred to more lofty expectations, and to open our mouths wider by the thought of the 'God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant'; and ask ourselves what result on us will correspond to that mighty name of the Lord.

II. And so, secondly, note the divine work which fulfils the prayer.

'Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.' Creation, Providence, and all God's works in the world are also through Jesus Christ. But the work which is spoken of here is yet greater and more wonderful than the general operations of the creating and preserving God, which also are produced and ministered through that eternal Word by whom the heavens were of old, and by whom the heavens are still, sustained and administered. There is, says my text, an actual divine operation in the inmost spirit of every believing man.

I suppose that everybody must believe that, who believes in a God having any real connection with His

creatures. Surely He is not so imprisoned in His own majesty, or shut out from His own creation, by His own creation, as that He cannot touch the spirits which He has made. And surely we are not so walled up by our own separate individuality as that we cannot, if we will, open the door for Him to come in and dwell with us, and work on us. Surely if there be any reality in the gospel teaching at all there is this in it, that Christ in us, or God in Christ working in us by His divine spirit, is the crown of that hope and blessing of which Christ for us is the beginning and foundation.

I do not want men to think less of the Cross. God forbid! But I do feel, and feel growingly, that the Christianity of this generation has not a firm hold of this other aspect of Christ's work. Do not think less of what He has done, but, oh! think more of what He is doing. The perspective of our Christian faith is wrong: not that we draw the Cross too large, but that we paint the dove too small. And I would for myself and for you, dear brethren, lay this thought upon our hearts, as a far more important one than the ordinary type of Christian thinking makes it out to be—the present dwelling of God in Christ, through the divine spirit, in the hearts of all who believe, and working there that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

If that has truth, surely these things follow as our plain duty. Expect that operation! *Do* you? You Christian men and women, do you believe that God will work in your hearts? Some of you do not live as if you did. Desire it! *Do* you desire it? Do you want Him to come and clear out that stable of filth that you carry about with you? Do you wish Him to come and sift and search, and bring the candle of the Lord into the dusty corners? Do you

want to get rid of what is not pleasing in His sight? Would you like Him to come and search you, 'to try you and see if'—ah, it is not an if!—'there be any wicked way in you, and lead you'—where alas! our feet are often *not* found—'in the way everlasting'? Expect it! desire it! pray for it! And when you have got it, see that you profit by it!

God does not work by magic. The Spirit of God which cleanses men's hearts cleanses them on condition, first, of their faith; second, of their submission; and, third, of their use of His gift. If you fling yourselves into the roar of worldly life, the noise of the streets, and the whirring of the looms, and the racket of the children in the nursery, and the buzzing of temptations round about you, and the yelpings for food of your own passions, will deafen your ears so as that you will never hear the still, small voice that speaks a present God. If God dwells in us and works in us, let us yield ourselves to the workings and open our hearts to the Guest, and say, 'Into every corner, O Lord, I would that Thou wouldst go, to restore and complete.'

III. Lastly, notice the visible manifestation of this inward work.

Now the writer of our text employs the same word in the two clauses, in order to bring out the idea of a correspondence between the human and the Divine Worker. 'To *work* His will, *working* in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

God works in order that you and I may work. Our action is to follow His. Practical obedience is the issue, and it is the test, of having this divine operation in our hearts. There are plenty of people who will talk largely about spiritual gifts, and almost vaunt their possession of such a divine operation. Let us

bring them and ourselves to this test: Are you doing God's will in daily life in the little things? In the monotonous grind of the dusty, level road with never a turn in it, and the same thing to be done to-morrow that was done to-day, and so on for indefinite weeks and months, are you, with the spirit that freshens the monotony, doing God's will? If so, then you may believe that God is working in you. If not, it is no use talking about spiritual gifts. The test of being filled with the divine operation is that our actions shall be conformed to His will. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.' That is a pin prick that will empty many a swollen bladder, and bring it down to its real tenuity of substance.

Action is the end of all. We get the truth, we get our souls saved, we have all the abundance and exuberance of divine revelation, we have the Cross of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of the Divine Spirit—miracles and marvels of all sorts have been done for the one purpose, to make us able to do what is right in God's sight, and to do it because it is His will.

This practical obedience to God's will is the perfection of human conduct. And, on the other hand, a man who does good things without reference to the highest—viz., the will of God—in the doing of them, lacks the fine gold that gilds his deed; and the violet of his virtue is scentless. A good thing may be done without reference to God—good from the point of view of morality and the self-sacrifice and generosity that are embodied in it. But no good thing reaches its supremest goodness unless it be an act of conscious obedience to God's will.

And this doing of the will of God is perfect blessedness. All things are right for us if we submit to the

will of our Father. No storms can blow us out of our course then. 'Thou shalt make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee,' for all creatures being God's servants, are in covenant with him who does the will of the Lord.

And how are we to do it, brother? The world says, 'cultivate your own nature; correct your faults; strive to fill up your deficiencies.' Christ says, 'Cast away yourselves; and trust to Me; and I will give you new life, and a new spirit. Cultivate that!' If we are to do God's will we must have the spirit of Him who said, 'I come to do Thy will, O Lord; and Thy law is within My heart.' Let us open our hearts to Him; let us seek for Him to enter in. And then, 'the God of peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall make us perfect in every good; to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'

GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

PATIENCE AND HER WORK

'Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.'—JAMES i. 4.

IT does not appear from the rest of this letter that the persons to whom it was addressed were under the pressure of any particular trouble or affliction. Seeing that they are 'the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,' the width of that superscription makes it improbable that the recipients were undergoing any common experience. It is the more noteworthy, therefore, that at the very outset James gives this exhortation bearing upon trials and troubles. Clearly it is not, as we often take it to be, a counsel only for the sorrowful, or an address only to a certain class of persons, but it is a general exhortation applicable to all sorts of people in all conditions of life, and indispensable, as he goes on to say, for any progress in Christian character.

'Let patience have her perfect work' is an advice not only for sad hearts, or for those who may be bowed down under any special present trouble, but for us all. And it is the condition on which it is possible, and without which it is impossible, that any Christian man should be 'perfect and entire, wanting nothing.' So I want you to look with me, first, at what is the scope of this counsel; and then at how it

can be obtained; and then why it is so important: what—how—why.

I. First, then, what is the meaning of the counsel to 'let patience have its perfect work'?

Notice that the very language of the text puts aside the common notion that patience is a passive grace. The 'patience' of my text does 'work.' It is an active thing, whether that work be the virtues that it produces, or, as is more probable, its own preservation, in unbroken activity. In any case, the patience that James would have us all cultivate is an intensely active energy, and not a mere passive endurance. Of course I know that it takes a great deal of active energy to endure passively. There is a terrible strain upon the nerves in lying still on the operating-table without wincing, and letting the surgeon's knife cut deep without shrinking or screaming. There is much force that goes to standing motionless when the wind is blowing. But, for all that, the mere bearing of trouble by no means covers the whole ground of this royal and supreme virtue to which my text is here exhorting us. For, as I have often had occasion to say, the conception of 'patience' in the New Testament includes, indeed, that which is generally supposed to be its sole signification—viz., bearing unresistingly and unmurmuring, and with the full consent of a yielding will, whatever pains, sorrows, losses, troubles, or disappointments may come into our lives, but it includes more than that. It is the fixed determination to 'bate not one jot of heart or hope, but still bear up, and steer right onwards,' in spite of all hindrances and antagonisms which may storm against us. It is perseverance in the teeth of the wind, and not merely keeping our place in spite of it, that James exhorts us to here. The

ship that lies at anchor, with a strong cable and a firm grip of the flukes in a good holding-ground, and rides out any storm without stirring one fathom's length from its place, exhibits one form of this perseverance, that is patience. The ship with sails wisely set, and a firm hand at the tiller, and a keen eye on the compass, that uses the utmost blast to bear it nearer its desired haven, and never yaws one hairbreadth from the course that is marked out for it, exhibits the other and the higher form. And that is the kind of thing that the Apostle is here recommending to us—not merely passive endurance, but a brave, active perseverance in spite of antagonisms, in the course that conscience, illuminated by God, has bidden us to run.

And if you want instances of it I will give you two. 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.' All through Christ's life the shadow of the Cross closed His view; and, unfaltering, unswerving, unresting, unreluctant, He measured every step of the path, and was turned aside by nothing; because 'for that hour He came into the world,' and could not blench because He loved.

I will give you another, lower, and yet like, caught from and kindled by, the supreme example of persistence in duty. 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I might finish my course with joy.' The Apostle, who was warned on all sides by voices of prophets, and by tears and by supplications of friends, had his path clearly marked out for him, by his own conscience responsive to the will of God. And that path, whatsoever happened, he was resolved to tread. And that is the temper that my text commands us all to cultivate.

Beautiful and hard as bearing sorrows rightly may

be, that is only a little corner of the grace that my text enjoins.

And so, dear friends, will you let me put the two or three words more that I have to say about this matter into the shape of counsel, not for the sake of dictating, but for the sake of giving point to my words? I would say, then, to every man, bear unmurmuring the burdens and sorrows that each of you have to bear. There are some of us, no doubt, who have some special grief lying at our hearts. There are many of us, I doubt not, who know what it is to have for all the rest of our lives a wound that never can be healed, to carry a weight that never can be lessened, and to walk in a darkness that never can be lightened. Irremediable losses and sorrows are the portion of some of my hearers. Let patience have her 'perfect work'; and bow, bow to that supreme and loving will.

But, beyond that, do not let all your effort and energy be swallowed up in rightly enduring what you may have to endure. There are many of us who make some disappointment, some loss, some grief, the excuse for shirking plain duty. There is nothing more selfish than sorrow, and there is nothing more absorbing, unless we guard against its tendency to monopolise. Work! Work for others, work for God is our best comforter next to the presence of God's Divine Spirit. There is nothing that so lightens the weight of a life-long sorrow as to make it the stimulus to a lifelong devotion; and if our patience has its perfect work it will not make us sit with folded hands, weeping for the days that are no more, but it will drive us into heroic and energetic service, in the midst of which there will come some shadow of consolation or, at least, some blessed oblivion of sorrow.

Again, I would say, on the wider view of the meaning of this great exhortation, let no antagonism or opposition of any sort come between us and the plain path of Christian service and duty. And remember that the patience of my text has to be applied, not only in reference to the unswerving prosecution of the course which God and our own consciences dictate to us in the face of difficulties, sorrows, and losses, but also to the unswerving prosecution of that same path in the face of the opposite things—earthly delights and pleasures, and the seductions of the world, as well as the darknesses and sorrows of the world. He that lets his endurance have its perfect work will scorn delights as well as subdue sorrows. The clouds darken, but the sun dazzles. It is not only the rocks that threaten Ulysses and his crew, the sirens sit upon their island home, with their harps of gold, and trill their sweet songs, and no man understands what Christian endurance is who has not learned that he has to 'endure' in the face of joys as well as in the face of sorrows, and that persistence in the Christian course means that we shall spurn the one and turn our backs upon the other when either of them threaten to draw us aside from the path.

I might gather all that I have to say about this great queenly virtue of perseverance in the face of antagonisms into the one word of the Apostle, 'I count them but dung that I may win Christ.' 'Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark.' 'Let patience have her perfect work.'

II. And now, secondly, a word as to how this precept may best be carried out.

It is a precept. The perfecting of Christian en-

durance is not a thing that comes without effort. And so the Apostle puts it into the shape of an exhortation or an injunction. He does not specify methods, but I may venture to do so, in a few sentences.

And I put first and foremost here, as in all regions of Christian excellence and effort, the one specific which makes men like the Master—keeping near Him. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, 'consider' (by way of comparison) Him that endured, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.'

Oh, brethren! there is nothing that sucks the brightness out of earthly joys when they threaten to interrupt our course, and dazzle our eyes, like turning our attention to Christ, and looking at Him. And there is nothing that takes the poison-sting, and the irritation consequent on it, out of earthly sorrows like remembering the 'Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' Am I to grumble when I think of Him? Shall I make a moan and a mourning for my sorrows when I remember His? Am I to say, 'O Lord! Thou hast given me as much as I can manage in bearing this terrible blow which Thou hast aimed at me, without repining against Thee. I cannot do any work because I have got so much to bear'? Are we to say that when we remember how He counted not His life dear to Himself, and bore all, and did all, that He might accomplish the Father's will? Do not let us magnify our griefs, but measure them by the side of Christ's. Do not let us yield to our impatience, but rather let us think of Him. Consider Him, and patience will have her perfect work.

Again, let me say, if we would possess in its highest

degree this indispensable grace of persistent determination to pursue the Christian course in spite of all antagonisms, we must cultivate the habit of thinking of life, in all its vicissitudes, as mainly meant to make character. That is what the Apostle is saying in the context. He says, 'Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.' That is a paradox. It bids a man to be glad because he has trouble and is sad. It seems ridiculous, but the next verse solves the paradox: 'Knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience.' That is to say—if I rightly understand the meaning of this world in its bearing on myself, the intention of my whole life to make me what God would have me to be, then I shall not measure things by their capacity to delight and please taste, ambitions, desires, or sense, but only by their power to mould me into His likeness. If I understand that the meanings of sorrow and joy are one, that God intends the same when He gives and when He withdraws, that the fervid suns of autumn and the biting blasts of November equally tend to the production of the harvest, that day and night come from the same cause—the revolution of the earth; if I understand that life is but the scaffolding for building character, and that, if I take out of this world, with all its fading sweets and its fleeting sadnesses, a soul enlarged, ennobled by difficulties and by gladnesses, then I shall welcome them both when they come, and neither the one nor the other will be able to deflect me from my course.

And so, lastly, about this matter, I would say bring the future into immediate connection with the present, and that will illuminate the dark places, will minimise the sorrows, will make the crooked things straight and

the rough places plain, will prevent joy from being absorbing, and anxiety from being corroding, and sorrow from being monopolising, and will enable us to understand how all that is here is but preparatory and disciplinary for that great and serene future. And so the light affliction, which is but for a moment, will not be so very hard to bear; and the efforts at likeness to Jesus Christ, the consequences of which will last through eternity, will not be so very difficult to keep up; and patience, fed by contemplation of the suffering Christ, and nurtured further by consideration of the purpose of life, and stimulated by the vision of the future to which life here is but the vestibule, will have 'her perfect work.'

III. And, lastly, Why is this grace so important?

James says, with his favourite repetition of the same word, 'Let her work be perfect, that ye may be perfect.' Such endurance is indispensable to growth in Christian character.

I do not need to enter, at this stage of my sermon, on the differences between 'perfect' and 'entire.' The one describes the measure of the individual graces belonging to the man; the other describes the completeness of the assemblage of such graces. In each he is 'perfect,' and, having all that belongs to complete humanity, he is 'entire.' That is the ideal to which we have to press.

That is an ideal to which we may indefinitely approximate. There are people now—as there always have been—who are apt to substitute emotion and passivity for effort in the path of Christian perfection. I would take James's teaching. Let your perseverance have her perfect work, and by toil and by protracted effort, and by setting your teeth against all seductions,

and by curbing and ruling your sorrows, you will reach the goal. God makes no man perfect without that man's diligent and continuous struggle and toil, toil, indeed, based upon faith; toil, indeed, which receives the blessing, but toil all the same.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, how, in both the narrower and the wider sense of this word, the perseverance of my text is indispensable to Christian character.

I dare say we all of us know some chronic invalid say, on whose worn face there rests a gleam like that of the Lawgiver when He came down from the mount, caused by sorrow rightly borne. If your troubles, be they great or small, do not do you good they do you harm. There is such a thing as being made obstinate, hard, more clinging to earth than before by reason of griefs. And there is such a thing as a sorrow rightly borne being the very strength of a life, and delivering it from many a sin. The alabaster sheet which is intended to be fitted into the lamp is pared very thin that the light may shine through. And God pares away much of our lives in order that through what is left there may gleam more clearly and lambently the light of an indwelling God.

There is nothing to be won in the perfecting of Christian character without our setting ourselves to it persistently, doggedly, continuously all through our lives. Brethren, be sure of this, you will never grow like Christ by mere wishing, by mere emotion, but only by continual faith, rigid self-control, and by continual struggle. And be as sure of this, you will never miss the mark if, 'forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before,' you 'let patience have her perfect work,' and press towards

Him who is Himself the Author and Finisher of our patience and of our faith.

DIVINE WISDOM, AND HOW TO GET IT

'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.'—JAMES i. 5.

'IF any of you *lack*.' James has just used the same word in the previous verse, and it is to be regretted that the principle upon which our authorised translators went of varying the rendering of identical expressions, masks the repetition here. James has just been telling his brethren that their aim should be to be 'perfect and entire, *lacking* nothing.' And that thought naturally suggests the other one of how great the contrast is between that possible completeness and the actual condition of Christians in general. So he gently and courteously puts, as a hypothesis, what is only too certain a fact in those to whom he is speaking; and says, not as he might have done, '*since* you all lack,' but, with gracious forbearance, '*if* any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.'

Now, it seems to me that, in this hypothetical exhortation there are three points to be noted, two of them being somewhat unlike what we should have looked for. One is the great deficiency in the average Christian character—*wisdom*; another is the great means of supplying it—*ask*; and the third is the great guarantee of the supply—*the giving God*, whose gifts are bestowed on all liberally and without upbraiding.

I. The great deficiency in the average Christian character—wisdom.

Now, that is not exactly what we should have expected to be named as the main thing lacking in the average Christian. If we had been asked to specify the chief defect we should probably have thought of something else than wisdom. But, if we remember who is speaking, we shall understand better what he means by this word. James is a Jew, steeped through and through in the Old Testament. We have only to recall the Book of Proverbs, and what it has to say about 'wisdom' and 'folly,' by which it means something a great deal deeper and more living than knowledge and ignorance or intellectual strength and feebleness, or practical sagacity and its opposite. That deeper conception of wisdom which bases it all on 'the fear of the Lord,' and regards it as moral and spiritual and not as merely or chiefly intellectual, pervades the whole New Testament. This Epistle is more of an echo of the earlier revelation than any other part of the New Testament, and we may be quite sure that James uses this venerable word with all the associations of its use there, and in all the solemn depth of meaning which he had learned to attach to it, on the lips of psalmists, prophets, and teachers of the true wisdom. If that were at all doubtful, it is made certain by his own subsequent description of 'wisdom.' He says that it is 'from above,' and then goes on to ascribe all manner of moral and spiritual good to its presence and working on a man. It is 'pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.' You cannot say such glowing things about the wisdom which has its seat in the understanding only, can you? These characteristics must apply to something a great deal more august and more powerful in shaping and refining character.

What, then, does James mean by 'wisdom'? He means the sum of practical religion. With him, as with the psalmist, sin and folly are two names for the same thing, and so are religion and wisdom. He, and only he, has wisdom who knows God with a living heart-knowledge which gives a just insight into the facts of life and the bounds of right and wrong, and which regulates conduct and shapes the whole man with power far beyond that of knowledge however wide and deep, illuminating intellect however powerful. 'Knowledge' is poor and superficial in comparison with this wisdom, which may roughly be said to be equivalent to practical religion.

The use of this expression to indicate the greatest deficiency in the average Christian character, just suggests this thought, that if we had a clear, constant, certain, God-regarding insight into things as they are, we should lack little. Because, if a man habitually kept vividly before him the thought of God, and with it the true nature and obligation and blessedness of righteous, loving obedience, and the true foulness and fatalness of sin—if he saw these with the clearness and the continuity with which we may all see the things that are unseen and eternal, if he 'saw life steadily, and saw it whole,' if he saw the rottenness and the shallowness of earthly things and temptations, and if he saw the blessed issue of every God-pleasing act—why! the perfecting of conduct would be secured.

It would be an impossibility for him, with all that illumination blazing in upon him, *not* to walk in the paths of righteousness with a glad and serene heart. I do not believe that all sin is a consequence of ignorance, but I do believe that our average Christian life would be revolutionised if we each carried clear

before us, and continually subjected our lives to the influence of, the certain verities of God's word.

And, brethren, I think that there is a practical direction of no small importance here, in the suggestion that the thing that we want most is clearer and more vivid conceptions of the realities of the Christian revelation, and of the facts of human life. These will act as tests, and up will start in his own shape the fiend that is whispering at our ears, when touched by the spear of this divine wisdom. So, brethren, here is our root-deficiency; therefore instead of confining ourselves to trying to cure isolated and specific faults, or to attain isolated and specific virtues, let us go deeper down, and realise that the more our whole natures are submitted to the power of God's truth, and of the realities of the future and of the present, of Time and Eternity, the nearer shall we come to being 'perfect and entire,' lacking nothing.

II. We have next to note the great means of supplying that great deficiency—'let him ask.'

That direction might at first sight strike one as being, like the specification of the thing lacking, scarcely what we should have expected. Does James say, If any of you lack 'wisdom,' let him sit down and think? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom,' let him take a course of reading? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom,' let him go to pundits and rabbis, and get it from them? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask.' A strange apparent disconnection between the issue and the means suggested! Very strange, if *wisdom* lives only up in the head! not so strange if it has its seat in the depths of the human spirit. If you want to learn theology you have to study. If you seek to master any science you have to betake yourself to the appro-

priate discipline. It is of no use to pray to God to make you a good geologist, or botantist, or lawyer, or doctor, unless you also take the necessary means to become one. But if a man wants the divine wisdom, let him get down on his knees. That is the best place to secure it. 'Let him ask'; because that insight, so clear, so vivid, so constant, and so perfectly adequate for the regulation of the life, is of God. It comes to us from the Spirit of God that dwells in men's hearts.

I believe that in nothing is the ordinary type of Christian opinion amongst us, in this generation, so defective as in the obscurity into which it has pushed that truth, of the Spirit of God as actually dwelling in men's hearts. And that, I believe, is to a large extent the reason why the other truths of Christianity have so little power upon people. It is of little use to hold a Christianity which begins and ends with the fact of Christ's death on the Cross. It is of less use, no doubt, to hold a Christianity which does *not* begin with that death. But if it ends there, it is imperfect because, as the Apostle put it, our Christ, the Christ who sends wisdom to those who ask it, is the 'Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,' and sends down His Spirit on us.

And to receive that spirit of wisdom, the one thing necessary is that we should want it. That is all. Nothing more, but nothing less. I doubt very much whether hosts of the average Christian people of this generation do want it, or would know what to do with it if they had it; or whether the gift of a heart purged from delusions, and of eyes made clear always to behold the God who is ever with us, and the real importance of the things around us, is the gift

that most of us pray for most. 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask.' It is a gift, and it is to be obtained from that Holy Spirit who dwells and works in all believers. The measure of their desire is the measure of their possession. That wisdom can be had for the asking, and is not to be won by proudly self-reliant effort.

But let us not think that any kind of 'asking' suffices to put that great gift into our hearts. The petition that avails must be sincere, intense, constant, and accompanied by corresponding conduct.

It is not dropping down on your knees for two minutes in a morning, before you hurry out to business, and scrambling over a formal petition; or praying after you have gone to bed at night, and perhaps falling asleep before you get to 'Amen.' It is not asking, and then not waiting long enough to get the answer. It is not faint and feeble desire, but one presented with continuity which is not shameless importunity, but patient persistence. It must breathe intense desire and perfect confidence in the willingness of the Giver and in the power of prayer.

If our vessels are empty or nearly so, while the stream is rolling its broad, flashing flood past our doors, if we sit shivering beside dying embers while the fire blazes high on the hearth, let us awake to recognise the tragic difference between what we might be and what we are, and let us listen to James's other word, 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'If any of you lack wisdom'—and, alas! how many of us do, and that how sorely!—'let him ask of God.'

III. The great guarantee that such petitions shall be answered.

James has an arrangement of words in the original

which can scarcely be reproduced in an English translation, but which may be partially represented thus: 'Let him ask of the giving God.' That represents not so much the divine giving as an act, but, if I may so say, as a divine habit. It is just what the Prayer-book says, 'His nature and property is to have mercy.' He is the giving God, because He is the loving God; for love is essentially the impulse to impart itself to the beloved, and thereby to win the beloved for itself. That is the very life-breath of love, and such is the love of God. There is a *must* even for that heavenly nature. He *must* bestow. He is the 'giving'; and He is the blessed God because He is the loving and the giving God. Just as the sun cannot but pour out his rays, so the very activity of the divine nature is beneficence and self-impartation; and His joy is to grant Himself to His creature, whom He has made empty for the very purpose of giving all of Himself that the creature is capable of receiving.

But not only does James give us this great guarantee in the character of God, but he goes on to say, 'He giveth to *all* men.' I suppose that 'all' must be limited by what follows—viz., 'He gives to all who ask.'

'He gives to all men *liberally*.' That is a beautiful thought, but it is not the whole beauty of the writer's idea. The word translated 'liberally,' as many of you know, literally means 'simply, without any by-ends,' or any underlying thought of what is to be gained in return. That is the way in which God gives. People have sometimes objected to the doctrine of which the Scripture is full from beginning to end, that God is His own motive, and that His reason in all His acts is His own glory, that it teaches a kind of almighty and divine selfishness. But it is perfectly consistent with

this thought of my text, that He gives simply for the benefit of the recipient, and without a thought of what may accrue to the bestower. For why does God desire His glory to be advanced in the world? For any good that it is to Him, that you and I should praise Him? Yes! good to Him in so far as love delights to be recognised. But, beyond that, none. The reason why He seeks that men should know and recognise His glory, and should praise and magnify it, is because it is their life and their blessedness to do so. He desires that all men should know Him for what He is, because to do so is to come to be what we ought to be, and what He has made us to try to be; and therein to enjoy Him for ever. So 'liberally,' 'simply,' for the sake of the poor men that He pours Himself upon, He gives.

And 'without upbraiding.' If it were not so, who of us dare ask? But He does not say when we come to Him, 'What did you do with that last gift I gave you? Were you ever thankful enough for those other benefits that you have had? What is become of all those? Go away and make a better use of what you have had before you come and ask Me for any more.' That is how we often talk to one another; and rightly enough. That is *not* how God talks to us. Time enough for upbraiding after the child has the gift in his hand! Then, as Christ did to Peter, He says, having rescued him first, 'Oh! thou of little faith; wherefore didst thou doubt?' The truest rebuke of our misuse of His benefits, of our faithlessness to His character, and of the poverty of our askings, is the largeness of His gifts. He gives us these, and then He bids us go away, and profit by them, and, in the light of His bestowments, preach rebukes to ourselves for the poverty of our askings and our squandering of His gifts.

Oh, brethren! if we only believed that He is not an austere man, gathering where He did not straw, and reaping where He did not sow, but a 'giving God!' If we only believed that He gives simply because He loves us and that we need never fear our unworthiness will limit or restrain His bestowments, what mountains of misconception of the divine character would be rolled away from many hearts! What thick obscuration of clouds would be swept clean from between us and the sun! We do not half enough realise that He is the 'giving God.' Therefore, our prayers are poor, and our askings troubled and faint, and our gifts to Him are grudging and few, and our wisdom woefully lacking.

THE CROWN

'. . . The crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.' —JAMES i. 12.

MY purpose is to bring out the elements of the blessed life here, by grouping together those New Testament passages which represent the future reward under the metaphor of the 'crown,' and so to gain, if not a complete, at all events a comprehensive view of the elements of the blessedness of the perfected life hereafter.

These passages are numerous. Paul speaks of 'the incorruptible crown,' the reward of the victorious athlete, and of 'the crown of righteousness,' the anticipation of which soothed and elevated his last solitary hours. Peter speaks of the 'crown of glory,' the reward of the faithful elders. James speaks in my text of the 'crown of life' which the man wins who is proved by trial and stands the proof. The martyr

Church at Smyrna is encouraged to faithfulness 'unto death' by the promise of the 'crown of life' from the hands of the Lord of life. The angel of the Church at Philadelphia is stimulated to 'hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' The elders 'cast their crowns before the throne.' If we throw all these passages together, and study their combined effect, we shall, I think, get some helpful and stimulating thoughts.

I. I ask you, then, first to look with me at the general idea conveyed by the symbol.

Now the word which is employed in the passages to which we have referred is not that which usually denotes a kingly crown, but that which indicates the garland or wreath or chaplet of festivity and victory. A twist of myrtle or parsley or pine was twined round the brows of the athlete flushed with effort and victory. The laurel is the 'meed of mighty conquerors.' Roses, with violets or ivy, sat upon the brows of revellers. And it is thoughts of these rather than of the kingly tiara which is in the mind of the New Testament writers; though the latter, as we shall see, has also to be included.

So we get three general ideals on which I touch very lightly, as conveyed by the emblem.

The first is that of victory recognised and publicly honoured. So Paul uses the symbol in this sense in both the instances of its occurrence to which we have already referred, the reward of the racer or athlete in the *palæstrum*, and the 'crown of righteousness' which was to follow his having 'fought the good fight, and finished his course.' That implies that the present is the wrestling ground, and that the issues of the present lie beyond the present. We do not look for

flowers on the hard-beaten soil of the arena; and the time of conflict is no time for seeking for delights. If the crown be yonder, then here must be the struggle; and it must be our task 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' if we are ever to find that blessed result and reward of life here. We have, then, the general idea of victory recognised and publicly honoured by the tumult of acclaim of the surrounding spectators. 'I will confess His name before the angels of God.'

Then there is the other general idea of festal gladness. That, I suppose, is what was present particularly to Peter's mind when he talked about 'the wreath that fadeth not away.' I think that there is in his words a probable reference to a striking Old Testament passage, in which the prophet takes the drooping flowers on the foreheads of the drunkards of Samaria at their feast as an emblem of the swift fading of their delights, and of the impending destruction of their polity. But, says Peter, this wreath fades never. The flowers of heaven do not droop. It is an emblem of the calm and permanent delights which come to those behind whom is change with its sadness, and before whom stretches progress with its blessedness. Festal gladness, society, and the satisfaction of all desires are included in the meaning of the wreathed amaranthine flowers that twine round immortal brows.

But the usage in the Book of the Apocalypse stands upon a somewhat different footing. There are no Gentile images there. We hear nothing about Grecian games and heathen wrestlings in that book; but all moves within the circle of Jewish thought. That the word which is employed for 'the crown,' though it usually meant the victors' and the feasters' chaplet, sometimes also meant the king's crown of sovereignty,

is obvious from one or two of its uses in Scripture. For the 'crown of thorns' was a mockery of royalty, and the 'golden crowns' which the elders wear in the vision are associated with the thrones upon which they sit, as emblems, not of festal gladness or of triumphant emergence from the struggles and toils of life, but as symbols of royalty and dominion. The characteristic note of the promises of the Revelation is that of Christ's servants' participation in the royalty of their Lord. So to the other two general ideas which I have deduced from the symbol we must add for completeness this third one, that it shadows, in some of the instances of its use at all events, though by no means in all, the royalty so mysterious, by which every one of Christ's 'brethren is like the children of a king,' and all are so closely united to Him that they participate in His dominion over all creatures and things. Dominion over self, dominion over the universe, a rule mysterious and ineffable which is also service, cheerful and continuous, are contained in the emblem.

So these three general ideas, victory, festal gladness and abundance, royalty and sovereignty, are taught us by this symbol of the crown.

II. Now, secondly, note more particularly the constituent parts of that chaplet of blessedness.

There are two phrases as to these, amongst the passages with which we are now concerned. St. James and the Book of Revelation speak of the 'crown of life,' and Peter speaks of the 'crown of glory.' That is to say, the material of which the garland is composed is no perishable pine or myrtle, but it is woven, as it were, of 'life' on the one hand, of glory on the other. Or, if we do not venture upon such a violent metaphor as that, we can at least say that the crown *is* life and glory.

Now, as to the first of these—what dim and great thoughts are taught us in it! 'Life,' in the New Testament, does not mean bare existence, but in its highest sense pure and blessed existence in union with God. And such life—full, perfect, continual—is regarded as being in itself the crown and reward of faithful Christian living here below. In our experience life is often a burden, a weariness, a care. If it be a crown, it is a crown of thorns. But yonder, to live will be blessedness; being will be well-being. The reward of heaven will simply be the fact of living in God. Here life comes painfully trickling, as it were, in single drops through a narrow rift in the rock; yonder it will spread a broad bosom, flashing beneath the sunshine. Here the plant grows strugglingly in some dusty cleft, amidst uncongenial surroundings, and with only occasional gleams of sunlight; its leaves are small, its stem feeble, its blossoms pallid; yonder it will be rooted in rich soil and shone upon by an unclouded sun, and will burst into flowers and forms of beauty that we know nothing of here. Life is the crown.

Then it is a crown of glory. What is glory? The splendour of God's character manifested to His creatures and become the object of their admiration. That is the full meaning of glory in the Old and in the New Testament. And all that is transferred to those who cleave to Him here and are perfected yonder. There will be complete perfection of nature. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' The inmost and deepest beauty of redeemed and perfected souls will then be capable of being manifested fully. Here it struggles for expression, and what we seem to be, though it is often better, is just as often much

worse than we really are. But there we shall be able to show ourselves as what in our deepest hearts we are. For the servants who, girt with priestly vestments, do Him sacerdotal service in the highest temple, have His name blazing upon their foreheads, and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The redeemed souls, transmuted into the likeness of the Lord, and made visible in the flashing splendour of their gentle radiance, shall be beheld with the wonder with which all other creatures gaze on Him who is the Lord and Source of their purity, and 'if so be that we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified together.'

But why speak of what we know as little about as the unborn child does of the world, or the caterpillar of its future life when winged and painted and basking in the sunshine? Let us bow before the ignorance which is the prophecy and pledge of the transcendent greatness that lies behind the veil, and say, 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.'

III. Now, thirdly, note the conditions of the crown.

These are variously put with a rich variety. Paul speaks, as you remember, of 'the crown of righteousness,' by which he means to imply that on impure brows it can never sit, and that, if it could, it would be there a crown of poisoned thorns. None but the righteous can wear it. That is the first and prime indispensable condition. But then there are others stated in the other passages to which we have referred. The wrestler must 'strive lawfully,' according to the rules of the arena, if he is to be crowned. The man that is tried must 'endure his temptation,' and come out of it 'proved' thereby, as gold is tried by the fire. The martyr must be willing to die, if need be, for

fidelity to his Master. We must 'hold fast that which we have' if we are ever to win that which, as yet, we have not, even the crown that ought to be ours, and so is by anticipation called ours.

But two of the passages to which I have referred add yet another kind of condition and requirement. Paul says, 'Not to me only, but to all them also that *love* His appearing'; and James here says that the man who is tried will receive the crown 'which the Lord hath promised to them that *love* Him.' So it is not difficult to make out the sequence of these several conditions. Fundamental to all is love to Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of everything. Then, built upon that, for His dear sake, the manful wrestling with temptations and with difficulties, long-breathed running, and continual aspiration after the things that are before, fidelity, if need be, unto death, and a grim tenacity of grasp of the truth and the blessings already bestowed. These things are needed. And then as the result of the love that grasps Christ with hooks of flesh, which are stronger than hooks of steel, and will not let Him go, and as the result of the efforts and struggles and discipline which flow from that love to Him, there must be a righteousness which conforms to His image and is the gift of His indwelling Spirit. These are the conditions on which the crown may be ours.

Such righteousness may be imperfect here upon earth, and when we look upon ourselves we may feel as if there were nothing in us that deserves, or that even can bear, the crown to be laid upon our brows. But if the process have been begun here by love and struggling, and reception of His grace, death will perfect it. But death will not begin it if it have not

been commenced in life. We may hope that if we have our faces set towards the Lord, and our poor imperfect steps have been stumbling towards Him through all the confusions and mists of flesh and sense, our course will be wonderfully straightened and accelerated when we 'shuffle off this mortal coil.' But there is no sanctifying in death for a man who is not a Christian whilst he lives, and the crown will only come to those whose righteousness began with repentance, and was made complete by passing through the dark valley of death.

IV. Lastly, note the giver of the crown.

'Which the Lord hath promised,' 'which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day.' 'I will give him a crown of life.' So Jesus Christ, as Judge, as Brother, as Distributer of the eternal conditions of men, as indwelling in us and making us sharers of all that is His, bestows upon His servants the crown. Yet, let us remember that He does not give it in such a fashion as that the gift may be taken once for all and worn thereafter, independent of Him. It must be a continual communication, all through eternal ages, and right on into the abysses of celestial glories—a continual communication from His ever-opened hand. The energy of a present Christ bestowing at the moment (if there be moments in that dim future) is the condition of the crown's continued gleaming on brows that have worn it for ages, to which geological periods are but as the beat of a pendulum. Like the rainbow that continues permanently above the cataract, and yet at each moment is fed by new spray from the stream, so the crown upon our heads will be the consequence of the continual influx into redeemed souls of the very life of Christ Himself.

So, dear brethren, all ends as all begins, with cleaving to Him, and drawing from His fulness grace whilst we need grace, and glory when we are fit for glory. Strength for the conflict and the reward of the victory come from the same hand, and are ours on the same conditions. He who covers our heads in the day of battle is He who wreathes the garland on the conqueror's brow and keeps its flowers unfading through eternal ages. 'On His head are many crowns,' which He bestows upon His followers, and all the heaven of His servants is their share in His heaven. If, then, we love Him, if for His dear sake we manfully strive in the conflict, patiently accept the ministry of trial, discipline ourselves as athletes are willing to do for a poor parsley wreath, hold fast that which we have, and by faith, effort, and prayer, receive of His righteousness here, then the grave will be but as the dressing-room where we shall put off our soiled raiment and on our white robe; and thus apparelled, even we, unworthy, shall hear from Him, 'I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

'FIRST-FRUITS OF HIS CREATURES'

'. . . That we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.'—JAMES i. 18.

ACCORDING to the Levitical ceremonial, the first sheaf of the new crop, accompanied with sacrifice, was presented in the Temple on the day after the Passover Sabbath. No part of the harvest was permitted to be used for food until after this acknowledgment, that all had come from God and belonged to Him. A similar law applied to the first-born of men and of cattle. Both

were regarded as in a special sense consecrated to and belonging to God.

Now, in the New Testament, both these ideas of 'the first-born' and 'the first-fruits,' which run as you see parallel in some important aspects, are transferred to Jesus Christ. He is 'become the first-fruits of them that slept'; and it was no mere accidental coincidence that, in this character, He rose from the dead on the day on which, according to the law, the sheaf was to be presented in the Temple. In His case the ideas attached to the expression are not only that of consecration, but that of being the first of a series, which owes its existence to Him. He makes men 'the many brethren,' of whom He is 'the first-born'; and He, by the overflowing power of His life, raises from the dead the whole harvest of which He is the first-fruits.

Then that which Jesus Christ is, primarily and originally, all those who love Him and trust Him are secondarily and by derivation from Himself. Thus, both these phrases are further transferred in the New Testament to Christian people. They are the 'first-fruits unto God and the Lamb'; or, as my text has it here, with a qualifying word, 'a *kind* of first-fruits'; which expresses at once a metaphor and the derivation of the character. They are also 'the Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.'

So, then, in this text we have contained some great ideas as to God's purpose in drawing us to Himself. And I want you to look at these for a moment or two.

I. First, then, God's purpose for Christians is that they should be consecrated to Him.

The sheaf was presented before God in the symbolical ceremonial, as an acknowledgment of His

ownership of it, and of all the wide-waving harvest. It thereby became His in a special sense. In like manner, the purpose of God in bestowing on us the wondrous gift of a regeneration and new life by the word is that we should be His, yielding to Him the life which He gives, and all that we are, in thankful recognition and joyful consecration.

We hear a great deal about consecration in these days. Let us understand what consecration means. There is an inward and an outward aspect of it. In the inward aspect it means an entire devotion of myself, down to the very roots of my being, to God as Lord and Owner.

Man's natural tendency is to make himself his own centre, to live for self and by self. And the whole purpose of the gospel is to decentralise him and to give him a new centre, even God, for whom, and by whom, and with whom, and in whom the Christian man is destined, by his very calling, to live.

Now, how can an inward devotion and consecration of myself be possible? Only by one way, and that is by the way of love that delights to give. The yielding of the human spirit to the divine is only accomplished through that sweet medium of love. Self-surrender is the giving up of self at the bidding of love to Him to whom my heart cleaves.

The will will yield itself. There will be no murmuring at hard providences; no regrets darkening a whole life and paralysing duty, and blinding to blessings, by reason of the greatest sorrow which He may have sent. The will will yield in submission; the will will yield in obedience. According to the dreadful metaphor of the founder of the Jesuits—dreadful when applied to the relations of a man to a man,

but blessed when applied to the relation of a man to God, and of God to man—I shall be in His hands 'like a staff' in the hand of a man, only to be used as He desires.

Consecration means self-surrender; and the fortress of self is in the will, and the way of self-surrender is the flowery path of love.

To take the other metaphor of Scripture, by which the same idea is expressed—the consecration which we owe to God, and which is His design in all His dealings with us in the gospel, will be like that of a priestly offering of sacrifice, and the sacrifice is ourselves.

So much for the inward; what about the outward? All capacities, opportunities, possessions, are to be yielded up to Him as utterly as Christ has yielded Himself to us. We are to live for Him and work for Him; and set, as our prime object, conspicuously and constantly before us, and to be reached towards through all the trivialities of daily duty, and the common-places of recurring tasks, the one thing, to glorify God and to please Him. Consecration means the utter giving of myself away, in the inmost sanctuary of the spirit. And it means the resolute devotion of all that I have and all that I am in the outgoings of daily life to His service and to His praise.

That is what God meant for you and me when He made us Christians; that was His design when He sent His Son. And we thwart and counter-work Him, just in the measure in which we still make ourselves our own centre, our wills our own law, and our well-being our own aim.

Now, remember, such consecration is salvation. For the opposite thing, the living to self, is damnation and

hell and destruction. And whosoever is thus consecrated to God is in process of being saved. The relation between the two ideas is not, as it often is put, that you are to be saved that you may be consecrated; but, you are being saved in being consecrated. And the measure in which we have ceased to be devoted to ourselves, and are devoted to Him, is the accurate measure in which we have received the true salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

That consecration is blessedness. There is no joy of which a human spirit is capable that is as lofty, as rare and exquisite, as sweet and lasting, as the joy of giving itself away to Him who has given Himself for us. And such consecration is the true possession of what we give, and the only way of really owning ourselves or our possessions. 'He that loveth himself shall lose himself,' and he that gives himself away to God, a weak, sinful man, gets himself back from God, a hero, strong, and a saint.

Such consecration, which is the root of all blessedness, and the true way of entering into the possession of all possessions, is only possessible in the degree in which we subject ourselves to the influence of these mighty acts which God has done in order to secure it. Our yielding of ourselves to Him is only possible when we are quite sure that He has given Himself to us. Our love which melts us, and bows us in willing, joyful surrender, can only be the echo of His love. The pattern is set us in the Christ, and set us that we may imitate it, and we imitate it in the measure in which we lie exposed to its mighty power. 'He gave Himself for us, that He might purchase for Himself a people for His possession.' My surrender is but the echo of the thunder of His; my surrender is but the flash on

the polished mirror which gives back the sunbeam that smites it. We yield ourselves to God, when we realise that Christ has given Himself for us.

Christian men and women, behold your destiny! God's purpose concerning you is that you might be not your own, because you are bought with a price. And measure against that mighty purpose the halting obedience, the reluctant wills, the half-and-half surrender which is no surrender at all, which make up the lives of the average Christians among us, and see whether any of us can feel that the divine purpose is accomplished in us, or that we have paid what we owe to our God.

II. Secondly, my text suggests that God's purpose for Christians is that they should be specimens and beginnings of a great harvest.

The sheaf that was carried into the Temple showed what sun and rain and the sweet skyey influences had been able to do on a foot or two of ground, and it prophesied of the acres of golden grain that would one day be garnered in the barns. And so, Christian men and women to-day, and even more eminently at that time when this letter was written, are meant to be the first small example of a great harvest that is to follow. The design that God had in view in our being Christianised is that we should stand here as specimens of what He means the world to be, and as witnesses of what He, by the gospel, is able to make men.

If we strip that thought of its metaphor it just comes to this, that if Christianity has been able to take one man, pick him out of the mud and mire of sense and self, and turn him into a partially and increasingly consecrated servant of God, it can do that for anybody.

The little sheaf, though there be but a handful of nodding heads in it, is a sure pledge of the harvest on the great prairie yonder, as yet untilled and unsown, which will yet bear like fruit to His praise and honour.

'We have all of us one human heart.' Whatever may be men's idiosyncrasies or diversities of culture, of character, of condition, of climate, of chronology, they have all the same deep primary wants, and the deepest of them all is concord and fellowship with God. And the path to that is by faith in His dear Son, who has given Himself for us. If, then, that faith in one case has given to a man the satisfaction of that which all men are hungering for, whether they know it or not, and are restless and miserable till they find it, then there is document and evidence that this gospel, which can do that for the individual, can do it for the race. And so the first-fruits are the pledge and the prophecy of the harvest.

What a harvest is dimly hinted at in these words of my text; the 'first-fruits of His creatures!' That goes even wider than humanity, and stretches away out into the dim distances, concerning which we can speak with but bated breath; but at least it seems to suggest to us that, in accordance with other teaching of the New Testament, 'the whole creation' which 'groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now,' will, somehow or other, be brought into the liberty and the glory of the children of God, and, as humble waiters and attenders upon the kings who are the priests of the Most High, will participate in the power of the redemption. At all events, there seem to me to gleam dimly through such words as those of my text, the great prospects of a redeemed humanity, of a renewed

earth, of a sinless universe, in which God in Christ shall be all in all.

The possibility and the certainty of that issue lie in this comparatively humble fact, that some handful of poor men have found in Jesus Christ that which their finding of it in Him manifests to them, is the *elixir vitæ* and the hope of the world.

You are meant to be specimens, exhibitions of what God intends for mankind, and of what the gospel can do for the world. Do you think, Christian men and women, that anybody, looking at you, will have a loftier idea of the possibilities of human nature, and of the potentialities of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Because if they will not, then you have thwarted your Father's design when He sent you His Son.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that God's purpose for Christians is that they should help the harvest.

That does not lie in the Levitical ceremonial of the sheaf of the first-fruits, of course. Though even there, I may remind you, that the thing presented on the altar carried in itself the possibilities of future growth, and that the wheaten ear has not only 'bread for the eater but seed for the sower,' and is the parent of another harvest. But the idea that the first-fruits are not merely first in series, but that they originate the series of which they are the first, lies in the transference of the terms and the ideas to Jesus Christ; for, as I pointed out to you in my introductory remarks, when He is called 'the first-fruits of them that slept,' it is implied that He, by His power, will wake the whole multitude of the sleepers; and when it speaks of Him as 'the first-born among many brethren,' it is implied that He, by the communication of His life, will

give life, and a fraternal life, to the many brethren who will follow Him.

And so, in like manner, God's purpose in making us 'a kind of first-fruits of His creatures' is not merely our consecration and the exhibition of a specimen of His power, and the pledge and prophecy of the harvest, but it is that from us there shall come influences which shall realise the harvest of which our own Christianity is the pledge and prophecy. That is to say, all Christian men and women are Christians in order that they may make more Christians.

The capacity, the obligation, the impulse, are all given in the fact of receiving Jesus Christ for ourselves. If we have Him we *can* preach Him, if we have Him we *ought* to preach Him, if we have Him in any deep and real possession, we *must* preach Him, and His words will be like a fire in our bones, if we forbear; and we shall not be able to stay.

> 'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves.'

What do you get Christ for? To feed upon Him. Yes! But to carry the bread to all the hungry as well.

Do not say you cannot. You can talk about anything that interests you. You can speak about anything that you know. And are your lips to be always closed about Him who has given Himself for you? Do not say that you need special gifts for it. We do need special gifts for the more public and conspicuous forms of what we call preaching nowadays. But any man and any woman that has Christ in his or her heart can go to another and say, 'We have found the Messiah,' and that is the best thing to say.

You *ought* to preach Him. Capacity involves obligation. To have anything, in this world of needy men who are all knit together in the solidarity of one family—to have any anything implies that you impart it. That is the true communism of Christianity, to be applied not only to wealth but to everything, all our possessions, all our knowledge, all our influence. We get them that they may fructify through us to all; and if we keep them, we shall be sure to spoil them. The corn laid up in storehouses is gnawed by rats, and marred by weevils. If you want it to be healthy, and your own possession of it to increase, put it into your seed-basket; and 'in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand,' and it will come back to thee, 'seed for the sower and bread for the eater.'

Now this is a matter of individual responsibility. You cannot get rid of it. Every Christian has the obligation laid upon himself, and every Christian man has some sphere in which he can discharge it, and in which, if he discharge it not, he is a dumb dog lying down and loving to slumber. Oh! I wish I could get into you tongue-tied, cowardly Christian men and women who never open your mouths to a soul for the Master's sake, this conviction, that you are thwarting God's purposes, and that the blood of souls lies at your door by reason of your guilty silence.

If you believe these things which I have been saying to you, the application follows. 'The field is the world.' And neither criticisms about missionary methods nor allegations of the superior claims of the little bit of the field round about your own doors are a sufficient vindication before God, though they may be an excuse before men, for tepid interest in, or indifference

to, or lack of help of, any great missionary enterprise.

We have to sow beside all waters; and if any men in the world were ever debtors both to the Greek and to the barbarian, both to the Englishman and the foreigner, it is the members of this great nation of ours, which, 'as a nest hath gathered the riches of the nations, and there were none that peeped or muttered or moved the wing.' We are debtors to the heathen world, because whether we will or no we come into contact with heathen lands; and whether we take Bibles or not, our countrymen will take rum and gunpowder, and send men to the devil if we do not try to draw them to God. We are debtors to them in a thousand cases by injuries inflicted. We are debtors by benefits received; and we are debtors most of all because Christ died for them and for us equally.

And so, I beseech you, give us your help, and remember in giving it that 'God of His own will hath begotten us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.'

THE PERFECT LAW AND ITS DOERS

'Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.'—JAMES i. 25.

AN old tradition tells us that James, who was probably the writer of this letter, continued in the practice of Jewish piety all his life. He was surnamed 'the Just.' He lived the life of a Nazarite. He was even admitted into the sanctuary of the Temple, and there spent so

much of his time in praying for the forgiveness of the people that, in the vivid language of the old writer, his 'knees were hard and worn like a camel's.' To such a man the Gospel would naturally present itself as 'a law,' which word expressed the highest form of revelation with which he was familiar; and to him the glory of Christ's message would be that it was the perfecting of an earlier utterance, moving on the same plane as it did, but infinitely greater.

Now that, of course, is somewhat different from the point of view from which, for instance, Paul regards the relation of the Gospel and the Law. To him they are rather antitheses. He conceived mainly of the law as a system of outward observances, incapable of fulfilment, and valuable as impressing upon men the consciousness of sin.

But, though there is diversity, there is no contradiction, any more than there is between the two pictures in a stereoscope, which, united, represent one solid reality. The two men simply regard the subject from slightly different angles. Paul would have said that the gospel was the perfection of the law, as indeed he does say that by faith we do not make void, but establish, the law. And James would have said that the law, in Paul's sense, was a yoke of bondage, as indeed he does say in my text, that the gospel, in contrast with the earlier revelation, is the law of liberty.

And so the two men complement and do not contradict each other. In like manner, the earnest urging of work and insisting upon conduct, which are the keynote of this letter, are no contradiction of Paul. The one writer begins at a later point than the other. Paul is a preacher of faith, but of faith which works

by love. James is the preacher of works, but of works which are the fruit of faith.

There are three things here on which I touch now. First, the perfect law; second, the doers of the perfect law; and third, the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law.

I. First, then, the perfect law.

I need not dwell further upon James's conception of the gospel as being a law; the authoritative standard and rule of human conduct. Let me remind you how, in every part of the revelation of divine truth contained in the gospel, there is a direct moral and practical bearing. No word of the New Testament is given to us only in order that we may know truth, but all in order that we may do it. Every part of it palpitates with life, and is meant to regulate conduct. There are plenty of truths of which it does not matter whether a man believes them or not, in so far as his conduct is concerned. Mathematical truth or scientific truth leaves conduct unaffected. But no man can believe the principles that are laid down in the New Testament, and the truths that are unveiled there, without their laying a masterful grip upon his life, and influencing all that he is.

And let me remind you, too, how in the very central fact of the gospel there lies the most stringent rule of life. Jesus Christ is the Pattern, and from those gentle lips which say, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments,' law sounds more imperatively than from all the thunder and trumpets of Sinai.

Let me remind you, too, how in the great act of redemption, which is the central fact of the New Testament revelation, there lies a law for conduct. God's love redeeming us is the revelation of what we

ought to be, and the Cross, to which we look as the refuge from sin and condemnation, is also the pattern for the life of every believer. 'Be ye imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.' A revelation, therefore, of which every truth, to the minutest fibre of the great web, has in it a directly practical bearing; a revelation which is all centred and focused in the life which is example because it is deliverance; a revelation, of which the vital heart is the redeeming act which sets before us the outlines of our conduct, and the model for our imitation—is a law just because it is a gospel.

Such thoughts as these are needful as a counterpoise to one-sided views which otherwise would be disastrous. God forbid that the thought of the gospel of Jesus Christ as primarily a message of reconciliation and pardon, and providing a means of escape from the frightful consequences of sin, even separation from God, should ever be put in the background! But the very ardour and intensity of man's recognition of that as the first shape which Christianity assumes to sinful men, has sometimes led, and is always in possible danger of leading, to putting all other aspects of the gospel in the background. Some of you, for instance, when a preacher talks to you about plain duties, and insists upon conduct and practical righteousness, are ready to say, 'He is not preaching the gospel.' Neither is he, if he does not present these duties and this practical righteousness as the fruits of faith, or if he presents them as the means of winning salvation. But if your conception of Christianity has not grasped it as being a stringent rule of life, you need to go to school to James, the servant of God, and do not yet understand

the message of his brother Paul. The gospel is a Redemption. Yes! God be thanked; but because a Redemption, it is a Law.

Again, this thought gives the necessary counterpoise to the tendency to substitute the mere intellectual grasp of Christian truth for the practical doing of it. There will be plenty of orthodox Christians and theological professors and students who will find themselves, to their very great surprise, amongst the goats at last. Not what we believe, but what we do, is our Christianity; only the doing must be rooted in belief.

In like manner, take this vivid conception of the gospel as a law; as a counterpoise to the tendency to place religion in mere emotion and feeling. Fire is very good, but its best purpose is to get up steam which will drive the wheels of the engine. There is a vast deal of lazy selfishness masquerading under the guise of sweet and sacred devout emotion. Not what we feel, but what we do, is our Christianity.

Further, notice how this law is a perfect law. James's idea, I suppose, in that epithet, is not so much the completeness of the code, or the loftiness and absoluteness of the ideal which is set forth in the gospel, as the relation between the law and its doer. He is stating the same thought of which the Psalmist of old time had caught a glimpse. 'The law of the Lord is perfect,' because it 'converts the soul.' That is to say, the weakness of all commandment—whether it be the law of a nation, or the law of moral text-books, or the law of conscience, or of public opinion, or the like—the weakness of all positive statute is that it stands there, over against a man, and points a stony finger to the stony tables, 'Thou shalt!' 'Thou shalt

not!' but stretches out no hand to help us in keeping the commandment. It simply enjoins, and so is weak; like the proclamations of some discrowned king who has no army at his back to enforce them, and which flutter as waste paper on the barn-doors, and do nothing to secure allegiance. But, says James, this law is perfect—because it is more than law, and transcends the simple function of command. It not only tells us what to do, but it gives us power to do it; and that is what men want. The world knows what it ought to do well enough. There is no need for heaven to be rent, and divine voices to come to tell men what is right and wrong; they carry an all but absolutely sufficient guide as to that within their own minds. But there is need to bring them something which shall be more than commandment, which shall be both law and power, both the exhibition of duty and the gift of capacity to discharge it.

The gospel brings power because it brings life. 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law.' In the gospel that desideratum is supplied. Here is the law which vitalises and so gives power. The life which the gospel brings will unfold itself after its own nature, and so produce the obedience which the law of the gospel requires.

Therefore, says James further, this perfect law is freedom. Of course liberty is not exemption from commandment, but the harmony of will with commandment. Whosoever finds that what is his duty is his delight is enfranchised. We are set at liberty when we walk within the limits of that gospel; and they who delight to do the law are free in obedience; free from the tyranny of their own lusts, passions,

inclinations; free from the domination of men and opinion and common customs and personal habits. All those bonds are burnt in the fiery furnace of love into which they pass; and where they walk transfigured and at liberty, because they keep that law. Freedom comes from the reception into the heart of the life whose motions coincide with the commandments of the gospel. Then the burden that I carry carries me, and the limits within which I am confined are the merciful fences put up on the edge of the cliff to keep the traveller from falling over and being dashed to pieces beneath.

II. Now notice, secondly, the doers of the perfect law.

James has a long prelude before he comes to the doing. Several things are required as preliminary. The first step is, 'looketh into the law.'

The word employed here is a very picturesque and striking one. Its force may be seen if I quote to you the other instances of its occurrence in the New Testament. It is employed in the accounts of the Resurrection to describe the attitude and action of Peter, John, and Mary as they 'stooped down and looked into' the empty sepulchre. In all these cases the Revised Version translates the word as I have just done, 'stooping and looking,' both acts being implied in it. It is also employed by Peter when he tells us that the 'angels desire to look into' the mysteries of Redemption, in which saying, perhaps, there may be some allusion to the silent, bending figures of the twin cherubim who, with folded wings and fixed eyes, curved themselves above the mercy-seat, and looked down upon that mystery of propitiating love. With such fixed and steadfast

gaze we must contemplate the perfect law of liberty if we are ever to be doers of the same.

A second requirement is, 'and continueth.' The gaze must be, not only concentrated, but constant, if anything is to come of it. Old legends tell that the looker into a magic crystal saw nothing at first, but, as he gazed, there gradually formed themselves in the clear sphere filmy shapes, which grew firmer and more distinct until they stood plain. The raw hide dipped into the vat with tannin in it, and at once pulled out again, will never be turned into leather. Many of you do not give the motives and principles of the gospel, which you say you believe, a chance of influencing you, because so interruptedly, and spasmodically, and at such long intervals, and for so few moments, do you gaze upon them. Steadfast and continued attention is needful if we are to be 'doers of the work.'

Let me venture on two or three simple practical exhortations. Cultivate the habit, then, of contemplating the central truths of the gospel, as the condition of receiving in vigour and fulness the life which obeys the commandment. There is no mystery about the way by which that new life is given to men. James tells us here, in the immediate context, how it is. He speaks of 'God of His own will begetting us with the *word of truth*'; and of the 'engrafted word, which,' being engrafted, 'is able to save your souls.' Get that word—the principles of the gospel and the truths of revelation, which are all enshrined and incarnated in Jesus Christ—into your minds and hearts by continual, believing contemplation of it, and the new life, which is obedience, will surely spring. But if you look at the gospel of your

salvation as seldom and as superficially and with as passing glances as so many of you expend upon it, no wonder that you are such weaklings as so many of you are, and that you find such a gulf between your uncircumcised inclinations and the commandment of the living God.

Cultivate this habit of reflective meditation upon the truths of the gospel as giving you the pattern of duty in a concentrated and available form. It is of no use to carry about a copy of the 'Statutes at Large' in twenty folio volumes in order to refer to it when difficulties arise and crises come. We must have something a great deal more compendious and easy of reference than that. A man's cabin-trunk must not be as big as a house, and his goods must be in a small compass for his sea voyage. We have in Jesus Christ the 'Statutes at Large,' codified and put into a form which the poorest and humblest and busiest amongst us can apply directly to the sudden emergencies and surprising contingencies of daily life, which are always sprung upon us when we do not expect them and demand instantaneous decision. We have in Christ the pattern of all conduct. But only those who have been accustomed to meditate upon Him, and on the truths that flow from His life and death, will find that the sword is ready when it is needed, and that the guide is at their side when they are in perplexity.

Cultivate the habit of meditating on the truths of the gospel, in order that the motives of conduct may be reinvigorated and strengthened. And remember that only by long and habitual abiding in the secret place of the Most High, and entertaining the thoughts of His infinite love to us, as the continual attitude of

our daily life, shall we be able to respond to His love with the thankfulness which springs to obedience as a delight, and knows no joy like the joy of serving such a Friend.

These requirements being met, next comes the doing. There must precede all true doing of the law this gazing into it, steadfast and continued. We shall not obey the commandment except, first, we have received and welcomed the salvation. There must be, first, faith, and then obedience. Only he who has received the gospel in the love of it will find that the gospel is the law which regulates his conduct. 'Faith without works is dead'; works without faith are rootless flowers, or bricks hastily and incompletely huddled together without the binding straw.

But, further, the text suggests that the natural crown of all contemplation and knowledge is practical obedience. Make of all your creed deed. Let everything you believe be a principle of action too; your *credenda* translate into *agenda*. And, on the other hand, let every deed be informed by your creed, and no schism exist between what you are and what you believe.

III. Lastly, note the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law. There is an echo in the words of my text, of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, the form in which the gospel was, perhaps, dearest to this Apostle. He uses the same word—'Blessed.'

Notice the *in*; not 'after,' not 'as a reward for,' but 'blessed *in* his deed.' It is the saying of the Psalmist over again, whose words we have already seen partly reproduced in the former portion of this text, who, in the same great psalm, says: '*In* keeping Thy commandments there is great reward.' The rewards of

this law are not arbitrarily bestowed, separately from the act of obedience, by the will of the Judge, but the deeds of obedience automatically bring the blessedness. This world is not so constituted as that outward rewards certainly follow on inward goodness. Few of its prizes fall to the lot of the saints. But men are so constituted as that obedience is its own reward. There is no delight so deep and true as the delight of doing the will of Him whom we love. There is no blessedness like that of an increasing communion with God, and of the clearer perception of His will and mind which follow obedience as surely as the shadow does the sunshine. There is no blessedness like the glow of approving conscience, the reflection of the smile on Christ's face.

To have the heart in close communion with the very Fountain of all good, and the will in harmony with the will of the best Beloved; to hear the Voice that is dearest of all, ever saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it'; to feel 'a spirit in my feet' impelling me upon that road; to know that all my petty deeds are made great, and my stained offerings hallowed by the altar on which they are honoured to lie; and to be conscious of fellowship with the Friend of my soul increased by obedience; this is to taste the keenest joy and good of life, and he who is thus 'blessed in his deed' need never fear that that blessedness shall be taken away, nor sorrow though other joys be few and griefs be many.

But, remember, first believe, then work. We must begin where Paul told the Philippian gaoler to begin—'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'—if we are to end where James leads us. Do not begin your building at the roof, but put in the

foundations deep in penitence and faith. And then, let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.

PURE WORSHIP

'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.'—JAMES i. 27.

THIS is a text which is more often quoted and used than understood. The word 'religion' has somewhat shifted its meaning from that which it bore at the time of our translation. We understand by it one of two things. For instance, when we speak of the Mohammedan or the Brahminical religion we mean the body of beliefs, principles, and ceremonies which go to make up an objective whole. When we speak of an individual's religion we generally mean, not that which he grasps, but the act, on his part, of grasping the consciousness of dependence, the attitude of reverence and aspiration and love and its consequences within. But when our translation was made the word meant rather *worship* than religion, or, to use an expression which has been recently naturalised among us, it meant the 'cult' of a God, and that mainly, though not exclusively, by ceremonials, or by oral and verbal praise and petition. Now, it is obvious that that is the meaning of the expression in my text, because otherwise you would have a patently absurd saying. If James meant by 'religion' here what we now mean by it, to say that benevolence and personal purity are religion would be just equivalent to and as absurd as saying that a mother's love is washing and feeding her child, or that anger is a flushed face

and a loud voice. The feeling is one thing, the expression of it is another. The feeling is religion, the expression of it is worship. And so if you take the true meaning, not only of the original Greek, but also of the word 'religion' at the beginning of the seventeenth century, then you will understand the passage a little better than some of the people that are so often quoting it do.

For the writer is not talking about religion, but about its expression, 'worship.' And he says that 'true *worship*, pure and undefiled . . . is to visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.' He has been, in the previous verses, striking at various forms of self-deception, such as that a man should conceive himself to be all right, because he listens to the law, and then goes away and forgets it, or that a man should think himself a real worshipper, while he does not bridle his tongue, and then he states the general principle of my text — worship has for its selectest manifestation and form these two things, beneficence and purity. Now I would deal with these words and seek to point out first—

I. The noble ideal of life that is set before us here.

You observe that there are two great departments into which all the forms of individual duty are, as it were, swept. To put these into plain words, the one is beneficence, as the sum and substance of all our duties to our fellows, and the other is keeping ourselves pure, as the sum and substance of all our duties to ourselves. Now I would notice, for it strikes me as being remarkable, that duties to other people are put *first*, and duties to ourselves *second*. I do not know that there is any question of practical morality more

difficult for us to settle, with full satisfaction to ourselves, than the relative proportion, in our lives, of care for ourselves, for our own culture, for our own rectification, for our own growth in grace and righteousness, and our obligations to our fellows. It is very hard for us to note how much we ought to give to the definite purpose of trying to make ourselves better, and how much we ought to give to the other purpose of forgetting ourselves, and seeking for the good of other people. But James, although he does not enter into the difficulties which clog the solution of that question for us individually, does seem to think that the first thing to be looked after is other people, and that in looking after such other people we shall be most efficiently keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. And it is so, for if we get around us, as it were, an atmosphere of sympathy, of unselfish regard, of unwearied effort for the benefit of other people, it is like the thin film or air that may surround some object, and prevent the fire from reaching it for a moment or two. We shall find that by no means the least powerful detergent to purge from us the spots of the world is an honest and thorough-going flinging of ourselves into the necessities and the sorrows of other people.

But I should like to put in a caution here. I believe that there are a great many good folk in this generation who have their hands so full of Christian work that they have no time at all for the development of their own Christian character in any other way, and that they lack an intelligent grasp of the principles of the gospel, and many things that would make their work upon other people a hundred times better, just because they are so busy helping other folk that they have no time at all to look after themselves. And so

the Church as a whole to-day has, as I believe, not too much beneficent and religious machinery, for there never can be too much of that—but too much relatively to the strength of the Church to drive it. Your engine is too big for your boiler, and to this busy generation, in which 'Christian worker' has all but blotted out the conception of 'Christian thinker' and 'Christian scholar,' I believe that it needs to be preached, not so much 'Look after other people' as 'Do not forget yourself.' 'Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching,' was good counsel for Paul's young representative, and it is good counsel for us all. 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' 'Visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction,' by all means; *and* 'Keep yourselves unspotted from the world.'

I suppose that it is scarcely necessary to remark that James does not mean visiting the widows and fatherless to be taken as a complete statement of our duties to others. He singles out that one form which sympathy and hopefulness will take, as a typical example of the whole class of actions in which love will express itself. Nor need I do more than say in passing that 'visiting' means more than *calling on*—namely, looking after and caring for. The sum of all Christian duties to others, then, is gathered up in hopeful and sympathetic love, and in regard to ourselves James sums them up in what looks, after all, rather an incomplete ideal: 'Keep yourselves unspotted from the world.' He does not say with any falsely ascetic twist, 'Keep yourselves out of the world.' No! He says, 'Fling yourselves into it, and when you are in the thickest of the muddy ways, see that no spots and splashes of filth come on your white garments.' That implies that it is very likely, unless we take very rigid care

that contact with the external world, and with the aggregate of Godless men which makes the world, in the New Testament sense of the phrase, will infect Christian men and women with evil, even when they are going on with their works of beneficence. And I suppose we all know that that is true.

But here you get a very negative view of the sum of Christian duty. Some people preach 'culture.' James says, 'Try to keep yourselves clean.' He realises that there is something more to be done by each of us with ourselves than to develop or draw out and increase that which is in us, that there needs to be another process, and that is to get rid of a great deal that is within us. We must cease to be much of what we are before we can be that which we may be and ought to be. Slay self first that you may live. Cultivate? Yes! and crucify as well.

Nor does James think any the less nobly of the resulting self, because he says that you will form the noblest character mainly by the way of negation. I know, of course, that that is only one-sided; but do we not all know that by reason of the abounding evil around us, and the proclivities more or less dormant, but existing, to much of that evil, which are in our own hearts, we do need that the law of our life should very largely be cast in the form 'Do not.' Any man who has honestly set himself to the task of moulding his life into the likeness which God would approve, must know that to walk through the wards of an hospital and catch no infection, to stand in a dung-heap and bring away no stench nor foulness clinging to the robes, is as easy as it is to plunge into the world and catch no contagion and no pollution there.

And yet, says James, *you* have to do that. He sums up Christian duty in this negative form, that is remarkable, and he flings the whole weight and burden of it on the man himself, that is more remarkable still. And yet we have only to read the rest of the chapter to see that he is not forgetting that there must be a Divine Keeper to keep the keepers, and that we shall never keep ourselves 'unspotted' unless we trust to Him who has said 'I will keep thy feet from falling.' So we need not wonder at the emphasis that is placed on the human side of the energy that is to be put forth in order to mould men into this character. But I desire to say here what I think some tendencies of good people's opinions in this day do especially need: that we do not get cleansed, hallowed, sanctified, by faith only, but that the office of faith is to bring into our possession the power which will sanctify us if we use our own efforts. 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,' and not trust to faith alone to make us pure.

II. We have here, secondly, the true and pure worship in such a life.

I need not repeat what I have already said at the beginning of these remarks as to the true bearing of the principle laid down here. Only let me remind you that the writer is not flouting, or putting away out of court, other forms of action which are more frequently called worship. True religion, which expresses itself, according to James, most nobly in the worship of life, must express itself by all the other means which men have for expressing their inmost selves, by the worship of words, by symbolical deed, by a ceremonial as well as by the visiting of the widows and the fatherless,

and the keeping oneself unspotted from the world. But what is insisted upon here is that of these two ways—both of them equally natural and equally indispensable, if there be any religion to express—in some aspects the higher and the nobler is the dumb worship of a pure and beneficent life. Now, of course, we are accustomed as Nonconformists to think that texts of this sort hit the adherents of a more elaborate, sensuous, and ceremonial form of worship than finds favour in our eyes, very hard, and sometimes to forget that they hit us quite as hard. There may be quite as real ritualists amongst Nonconformists as there are amongst Anglicans or Roman Catholics—I was going to say amongst Quakers—as amongst the adherents of any form of Christian worship. For it is not the elaboration of the form, but it is the existence of it, that tempts men to trust too much to it. And the baldest—to use a modern term of opprobrium—Nonconformist worship may be just as productive of immoral reliance upon it, on the part of those who adhere to it, as the most elaborate and sensuous ceremonial that fills a cathedral with clouds of incense, and calls upon men to worship simply by looking on at a priest performing his miracle. Dear brethren, you and I need the warning as much as anybody ever did. There are people, I have no doubt, who leave their religion in their pews, and lock it up there in the box along with their hymn books, and whose notion of religion is very little more than coming to a so-called 'place of worship' and offering up verbal prayers. There creep in insincerity, unreality, unconscious hypocrisy; there creeps in mechanical, perfunctory utterance of the words of praise, or listening to the voice of the preacher. How many of you think about the hymns you sing, and make

them the expression of your own feelings? How many of you fancy that you have spent the Sunday rightly when you go to church and listen more or less attentively to what your minister may have to say to you, and then go out and live a life in flat contradiction to the prayers, and the hymns, and the readings, and the preachings in which you have nominally taken part? Oh, brethren! let us get into reality, and learn more and more than ever we have done that worship does not mean the external act, but the bowing of the spirit before God, and that amidst the many temptations to insincerity, unreality, and dead, fossil formalism, which adhere to all forms of oral and ceremonial worship, there is as much need to-day as ever there was that we should listen to him who says, 'What hath thy God required of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' 'Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name?' 'Depart from Me; I never knew you.'

III. And now let me say one last word as to the only possible foundation for such a life.

It is worship, it is the expression of religion, and only when it is the expression of religion will you find beneficence and purity in their highest and noblest forms. There are people that say, 'I do not understand the Psalms; they are far too rapturous and emotional for me. I do not care about Paul and his metaphysical theology. I cannot make much of John and his mysticism. Give me James. That is plain common-sense; that is good practical morality. No clouds of darkness, no fine-spun theories.' Yes, and James has for his fundamental principle that if you want morality you must begin with religion. He believes that visiting the widows and the fatherless in

affliction, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world, or, in other words, the highest form of morality, is the body, of which religion is the soul.

I am not going to enter upon that thorny question of the possibility of having an independent theory of ethics without religion, but my point is this—theory or no theory, where will you get the practical power that will work the theory and bring it out of the region of theory into the region of daily life and fact? I know it is extremely narrow, extremely old-fashioned, extremely illiberal, and I believe it is profoundly true. Begin with Jesus Christ and the wish to please Him, and there is the root out of which all these self-regarding and other's regarding graces and beauties will most surely come. I have no doubt that you can make your model of a life without Christianity, though I fancy that a great deal of the model comes from the Christianity. But after you have got it, then one comes and says, 'Well! it is all very pretty—a beautiful model; do you think it will work?' If you want it to work, obtain the fire of the Holy Spirit to get up the steam and then it will work. You must begin with religion if you are to have a vigorous moral life, and your work in the world must be worship if it is to rise to the height of these two great forms of beautiful and noble life, the regard for others and the effort at purity for yourselves.

Do not run away with the perversion of this text which says, 'I do not frequent churches and chapels; that is not worship. The diffused worship of my life is what God wants.' Yes, that is what God wants. And you will be most likely to render the diffused worship of a life if you have reservoirs in the life—like Sundays, like hours of private devotion and prayer—

from which will flow—and without which I doubt there will not deeply and perennially flow the broad streams of devotion all through your days. 'Work is worship' is a monastic motto that is very frequently quoted nowadays. Well, 'it depends,' as they say. Work is worship if there is a reference to God in it. It is not worship unless there is. Brethren, begin where the New Testament begins, with faith in Jesus Christ, and you will end with a worship which harmonises the service of the lip and the service of the life. And if you do not begin so, you may flout the prayers of the Church, and look upon our gatherings together as of very little value, but I doubt extremely whether you will ever have in your life the all-present reference to God which will make common deeds worship, and I doubt whether you will ever succeed either in beneficence to others, or in keeping yourselves unspotted from the world.

FAITH IN HIS NAME

'The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.'—JAMES ii. 1.

THE rarity of the mention of Jesus in this Epistle must strike every attentive reader; but the character of the references that *are* made is equally noticeable, and puts beyond doubt that, whatever is the explanation of their fewness, lower thoughts of Jesus, or less devotion to Him than belonged to the other New Testament writers, are not the explanation. James mentions Christ unmistakably only three times. The first occasion is in his introductory salutation, where, like the other New Testament writers, he describes himself as 'the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'; thus

linking the two names in closest union, and proffering unlimited obedience to his Master. The second case is that of my text, in which our Lord is set forth by this solemn designation, and is declared to be the object of faith. The last is in an exhortation to patience in view of the coming of the Lord to be our Judge.

So James, like Peter and Paul and John, looked to Jesus, who was probably the brother of James by birth, as being the Lord, whom it was no blasphemy nor idolatry to name in the same breath as God, and to whom the same absolute obedience was to be rendered; who was to be the object of men's unlimited trust, and who was to come again to be our Judge.

Here we have, in this remarkable utterance, four distinct designations of that Saviour, a constellation of glories gathered together; and I wish now, in a few remarks, to isolate, and gaze at the several stars —'the faith of our Lord—Jesus—Christ—the Lord of glory.'

I. Christian faith is faith in Jesus.

We often forget that that name was common, wholly undistinguished, and borne by very many of our Lord's contemporaries. It had been borne by the great soldier whom we know as Joshua; and we know that it was the name of one at least of the disciples of our Master. Its disuse after Him, both by Jew and Christian, is easily intelligible. But though He bore it with special reference to His work of saving His people from their sins, He shared it, as He shared manhood, with many another of the sons of Abraham. Of course, Jesus is the name that is usually employed in the Gospels. But when we turn to the Epistles, we find that it is comparatively rare for it to stand alone, and that in

almost all the instances of its employment by itself, it brings with it the special note of pointing attention to the manhood of our Lord Jesus. Let me just gather together one or two instances which may help to elucidate this matter.

Who does not feel, for example, that when we read 'let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith,' the fact of our brother Man having trodden the same path, and being the pattern for our patience and perseverance, is tenderly laid upon our hearts? Again, when we read of sympathy as being felt to us by the great High Priest who can be 'touched with a feeling of our infirmities, even Jesus,' I think we cannot but recognise that His humanity is pressed upon our thoughts, as securing to us that we have not only the pity of a God, but the compassion of a Man, who knows by experience the bitterness of our sorrows.

In like manner we read sometimes that '*Jesus* died for us,' sometimes that '*Christ* died for us'; and, though the two forms of the statement present the same fact, they present it, so to speak, from a different angle of vision, and suggest to us different thoughts. When Paul, for example, says to us, 'If we believe that *Jesus* died and rose again,' we cannot but feel that he is pressing on us the thought of the true manhood of that Saviour who, in His death, as in His resurrection, is the Forerunner of them that believe upon Him, and whose death will be the more peaceful, and their rising the more certain, because He, who, 'forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood likewise took part of the same,' has thereby destroyed death, and delivered them from its bondage. Nor, with less emphasis, and strengthening

triumphant force, do we read that this same *Jesus*, the Man who bore our nature in its fulness and is kindred to us in flesh and spirit, has risen from the dead, hath ascended up on high, and is the Forerunner, who for us, by virtue of His humanity, has entered in thither. Surely the most insensitive ear must catch the music, and the deep significance of the word which says, 'We see not yet all things put under him (*i.e.*, man), but we see *Jesus* crowned with glory and honour.'

So, then, Christian faith first lays hold of that manhood, realises the suffering and death as those of a true humanity, recognises that He bore in His nature 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' and that His human life is a brother's pattern for ours; that, He having died, death hath no more terrors for, or dominion over, us, and that whither the Man Jesus has gone, we sinful men need never fear to enter, nor doubt that we shall enter, too.

If our faith lays hold on Jesus the Man, we shall be delivered from the misery of wasting our earthly affections on creatures that may be false, that may change, that must be feeble, and will surely die. If our faith lays hold on the Man Jesus, all the treasures of the human love, trust, and obedience, that are so often squandered, and return as pain on our deceived and wounded hearts, will find their sure, sweet, stable object in Him. Human love is sometimes false and fickle, always feeble and frail; human wisdom has its limits, and human perfection its flaws; but the Man Jesus is the perfect, the all-sufficient and unchangeable object for all the love, the trust, and the obedience that the human heart can pour out before Him.

II. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ.

The earliest Christian confession, the simplest and

sufficient creed, was, Jesus is the Christ. What do we mean by that? We mean, first and plainly, that He is the realisation of the dim figure which arose, majestic and enigmatical, through the mists of a partial revelation. We mean that He is, as the word signifies etymologically, 'anointed' with the Divine Spirit, for the discharge of all the offices which, in old days, were filled by men who were fitted and designated for them by outward unction—prophet, priest, and king. We mean that He is the substance of which ancient ritual was the shadow. We mean that He is the goal to which all that former partial unveiling of the mind and will of God steadfastly pointed. This, and nothing less, is the meaning of the declaration that Jesus is the Christ; and that belief is the distinguishing mark of the faith which this Hebrew of the Hebrews, writing to Hebrews, declares to be the Christian faith.

Now I know, and I am thankful to know, that there are many men who earnestly and reverently admire and obey Jesus, but think that they have nothing to do with these old Hebrew ideas of a Christ. It is not for me to decide which individual is His follower, and which is not; but this I say, that the primitive Christian confession was precisely that Jesus was the Christ, and that I, for my part, know no reason why the terms of the confession should be altered. Ah, these old Jewish ideas are not, as one great man has called them, 'Hebrew old clothes'; and I venture to assert that they are not to be discarded without woefully marring the completeness of Christian faith.

The faith in Jesus must pass into faith in Christ; for it is the office described in that name, which gives all its virtue to the manhood. Glance back for a moment to those instances which I have already quoted of the

use of the name suggesting simple humanity, and note how all of them require to be associated with this other thought of the function of Christ, and His special designation by the anointing of God, in order that their full value may be made manifest.

For instance, 'Jesus died.' Yes, that is a fact of history. The Man was crucified. What is that to me more than any other martyrdom and its story, unless it derives its significance from the clear understanding of who it was that died upon the Cross? So we can understand that significant selection of terms, when the same Apostle, whose utterances I have already been quoting in the former part of this sermon, varies the name, and says, 'This is the gospel which I declared unto you, how that *Christ* died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'

Again, suppose we think of the example of *Jesus* as the perfect realised ideal of human life. That may become, and I think often does become, as impotent and as paralysing as any other specimen without flaw, that can be conceived of or presented to man. But if we listen to the teaching that says to us, '*Christ* died for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps,' then the ideal is not like a cold statue that looks down repellent even in its beauty, but is a living person who reaches a hand down to us to lift us to His own level, and will put His spirit within us, that, as the Master is, so may also the servants be.

Again, if we confine ourselves to the belief that the Man named *Jesus* has risen again, and has been exalted to glory, then, as a matter of fact, the faith in His Resurrection and Ascension will not long co-exist with the rejection of anything beyond simple humanity in His person. If, however, that faith could last, then He

might be conceived of as filling a solitary throne, and there might be no victory over death for the rest of us in His triumph. But when we can ring out as the Apostle did, 'Now is *Christ* risen from the dead,' then we can also say, 'and is become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

So, brethren, lift your faith in Jesus, and let it be sublimed into faith in Christ. 'Whom say ye that I am?' The answer is—may we all from our hearts and from our minds make it!—'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

III. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Now, I take it that that name is here used neither in its lowest sense as a mere designation of politeness, as we employ 'sir,' nor in its highest sense in which, referred to Jesus Christ, it is not unfrequently used in the New Testament as being equivalent to the 'Jehovah' of the Old; but that it is employed in a middle sense as expressive of dignity and sovereignty.

Jesus is Lord. Our brother, a Man, is King of the universe. The new thing in Christ's return to 'the glory which He had with the Father before the world was' is that He took the manhood with Him into indissoluble union with the divinity, and that a man is Lord. So you and I can cherish that wonderful hope: 'I will give to him that overcometh to sit with Me on My throne.' Nor need we ever fear but that all things concerning ourselves and our dear ones, and the Church and the world, will be ordered aright; for the hand that sways the universe is the hand that was many a time laid in blessing upon the sick and the maimed, and that gathered little children to His bosom.

Christ is Lord. That is to say, supreme dominion is

based on suffering. Because the vesture that He wears is dipped in blood, therefore there is written upon it, 'King of kings, and Lord of lords.' The Cross has become the throne. There is the basis of all true rule, and there is the assurance that His dominion is an everlasting dominion. So our faith is to rise from earth, and, like the dying martyr, to see the Son of Man at the right hand of the majesty of the heavens.

IV. Lastly, Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ, 'the Lord of glory.'

Now, the last words of my text have given great trouble to commentators. A great many explanations, with which I need not trouble you, have been suggested with regard to them. One old explanation has been comparatively neglected; and yet it seems to me to be the true one. 'The Lord' is a supplement which ekes out *a* meaning, but, as I think, obscures *the* meaning. Suppose we strike it out and read straight on. What do we get? 'The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.'

And is that not intelligible? Remember to whom James was writing—Jews. Did not every Jew know what the Shekinah was, the light that used to shine between the Cherubim, as the manifest symbol of the divine presence, but which had long been absent from the Temple? And when James falls back upon that familiar Hebrew expression, and recalls the vanished lustre that lay upon the mercy-seat, surely he would be understood by his Hebrew readers, and should be understood by us, as saying no more and no other than another of the New Testament writers has said with reference to the same symbolical manifestation—namely, 'The Word became flesh tabernacled among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only Begotten of

the Father, full of grace and truth.' James's sentence runs on precisely the same lines as other sentences of the New Testament. For instance, the Apostle Paul, in one place, speaks of 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.' And this statement is constructed in exactly the same fashion, with the last name put in opposition to the others, 'The Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.'

Now, what does that mean? This—that the true presence of God, that the true lustrous emanation from, and manifestation of, the abysmal brightness, is in Jesus Christ, 'the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His person.' For the central blaze of God's glory is God's love, and that rises to its highest degree in the name and mission of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Men conceive of the glory of the divine nature as lying in the attributes which separate it most widely from our impotent, limited, changeable, and fleeting being. God conceives of His highest glory as being in that love, of which the love of earth is a kindred spark; and whatever else there may be of majestic and magnificent in Him, the heart of the Divinity is a heart of love.

Brethren, if we would see God, our faith must grasp the Man, the Christ, the Lord, and, as climax of all names—the Incarnate God, the Eternal Word, who has come among us to reveal to us men the glory of the Lord.

So, brethren, let us make sure that the fleshy tables of our hearts are not like the mouldering stones that antiquarians dig up on some historical site, bearing half-obliterated inscriptions and fragmentary names of mighty kings of long ago, but bearing the many-syllabled Name written firm, clear, legible, complete upon them, as on some granite block from the stone-

cutter's chisel. Let us, whilst we cling with human love to the Man that was born in Bethlehem, discern the Christ that was prophesied from of old, to whom all altars point, of whom all prophets spoke, who was the theme end of all the earlier Revelation. Let us crown Him Lord of All in our own hearts, and let us, beholding in Him the glory of the Father, lie in His Light until we are changed into the same image. Be sure that your faith is a full-orbed faith; grasp all the many sides of the Name that is above every name. And let us, like the apostles of old, rejoice if we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name. Let us go forth into life for the sake of the Name, and, whatsoever we do in word or deed, let us do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.'—JAMES ii. 14-23.

JAMES thrice reiterates his point in this passage, and each repetition closes a branch of his argument. In verse 17 he draws the inference from his illustration of a worthy sympathy which does nothing; in verse 20 he deduces the same conclusion from the speech put into the mouth of an imaginary speaker; in verse 24 he draws it from the life of Abraham. We shall best

get hold of the scope of these verses by taking these three parts separately.

I. Now, most misconceptions of a writer's meaning are due to imperfect definition of terms. James was no metaphysician, and he does not stop to put precisely what he means by 'faith.' Clearly he meant by it the full evangelical meaning of trust when he used it in the earlier part of the letter (Jas. i. 3, 6; ii. 1-5). As clearly he here means a mere intellectual belief of religious truth, a barren orthodoxy. If that undeniable explanation of his terminology is kept steadily in view, much of the difficulty which has been found in bringing his teaching into harmony with Paul's melts away at once. There is a distinct difference of tone and point of view between the two, but they entirely agree in the worthlessness of such a 'faith,' if faith it can be called. Probably Paul would not have called it so, but James accepts the 'saying' of the man whom he is confuting, and consents to call his purely intellectual belief faith. And then he crushes it to atoms as hollow and worthless, in which process Paul would gladly have lent a hand.

We may observe that verse 14 begins with supposing the case of a mere lip 'faith,' while verse 17 widens its conclusion to include not only that, but any 'faith,' however real, which does not lead to works. The logic of the passage would, perhaps, hang better together if verse 14 had run 'if a man have faith'; but there is keen irony as well as truth in the suggestion that a faith which has no deeds often has abundant talk. The people who least live their creeds are not seldom the people who shout loudest about them. The paralysis which affects the arms does not, in these cases, interfere with the tongue. James had seen plenty of

that kind of faith, both among Pharisees and Jewish Christians, and he had a holy horror of loose tongues (Jas. iii. 2-12). That kind of faith is not extinct yet, and we need to urge James's question quite as much as he did: 'Can that faith save?' Observe the emphasis on 'that' which the Revised Version rightly gives.

The homely illustration of the very tender sympathy which gushes inwards, and does nothing to clothe naked backs or fill empty stomachs, perhaps has a sting in it. Possibly the very orthodox Jewish Christians with whom James is contending were less willing to help poor brethren than were the Gentile Christians.

But, in any case, there is no denying the force of the parallel. Sympathy, like every other emotion, is meant to influence action. If it does not, what is the use of it? What is the good of getting up fire in the furnace, and making a mighty roaring of steam, if it all escapes at the waste-pipe, and drives no wheels? And what is the good of a 'faith' which only rushes out at the escape-pipe of talk? It is 'dead in itself.' Romans ii. 17-29 shows Paul's way of putting the same truth. Emotion and beliefs which do not shape conduct are worthless. Faith, if it have not works, is dead.

II. The same conclusion is arrived at by another road in verses 18-20. James introduces an imaginary speaker, who replies to the man who says that he has faith. This new interlocutor 'says' his say too. But he is not objecting, as has been sometimes thought, to James, but to the first speaker, and he is expressing James's own thought, which the Apostle does not utter in his own person, perhaps because he would avoid the appearance of boasting of his own deeds. To take this speaker as opposing James brings hopeless confusion,

What does the new speaker say? He takes up the first one's assertion of having 'faith'; he will not say that he himself has it, but he challenges the other man to show his, if he can, by any other way than by exhibiting the fruits of faith, while he himself is prepared and content to be tested by the same test. That is to say, talk does not prove the possession of faith; the only possible demonstration that one has it is deeds, which are its fruits. If a man has (true) faith, it will mould his conduct. If he has nothing to produce but his bare assertion, then he cannot show it at all; and if no evidence of its existence is forthcoming, it does not exist.

Motion is the test of life. A 'faith' which does nothing, which moves no limb, is a corpse. On the other hand, if grapes grow ruddy and sweet in their clusters, there must be a vine on which they grow, though its stem and root may be unseen. 'What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh.' True faith will be fruitful. Is not this Paul's doctrine too? Does not he speak of 'faith that worketh by love?' Is it not his principle, too, that faith is the source of conduct, the active principle of the Christian life, and that if there are no results of it in the life, there is none of it in the heart?

But the second speaker has a sharp dart of irony in his quiver (verse 13). 'You plume yourself on your monotheistic creed, do you, and you think that that is enough to make you a child of God's? Well, that is good, as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. You have companions in it, for the demons believe it still more thoroughly than you do; and, what is more, it produces more effect on them than on you. You do nothing in consequence of your belief; they "shudder,"

at any rate—a grim result, but one showing that their belief goes deeper than yours.' The arrow gains in point and keenness if we observe that James quotes the very words which are contained in the great profession of monotheism which was recited morning and evening by every Jew (Deut. vi. 4, etc.). James seems, in verse 20, to speak again in his own name, and to reassert his main thought as enforced by this second argument.

III. He has been arguing from the very nature of faith, and the relation between it and conduct. Now he turns to history and appeals to Abraham's case. In these verses he goes over the same ground as Paul does in Romans v., and there is a distinct verbal contradiction between verse 24 here and Romans iii. 28; but it is only verbal. Are the two apostles writing in ignorance of each other's words, or does the one refer to the other, and, if so, which is the earlier? These are interesting questions, to deal with which satisfactorily would more than exhaust our space.

No doubt the case of Abraham was a commonplace in rabbinical teaching, and both Paul and James had been accustomed to hear his history commented upon and tortured in all sorts of connections. The mere reference to the patriarch is no proof of either writer having known of the other; but the manner of it raises a presumption in that direction, and if either is referring to the other, it is easier to understand Paul if he is alluding to James, than James as alluding to Paul.

Their apparent disagreement is only apparent. For what are the 'works' to which James ascribes justifying power? Verse 22 distinctly answers the question. They are acts which spring from faith, and which in

turn, as being its fruits, 'perfect' it, as a tree is perfect when it has manifested its maturity by bearing. Surely Paul's doctrine is absolutely identical with this. He too held that, on the one hand, faith creates work, and on the other, works perfect faith. The works which Paul declares are valueless, and which he calls 'the works of the law,' are not those which James asserts 'justify.' The faith which James brands as worthless is not that which Paul proclaims as the condition of justifying; the one is a mere assent to a creed, the other is a living trust in a living Person.

James points to the sacrifice of Isaac as 'justifying' Abraham, and has in mind the divine eulogium, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me,' but he distinctly traces that transcendent act of an unquestioning devotion to the 'faith' which wrought with it, and was perfected by it. He quotes the earlier divine declaration (Gen. xv. 6) as 'fulfilled' at that later time, by which very expression is implied, not only that the root of the sacrifice was faith, but that the words were true in a yet higher sense and completer degree, when that sacrifice had 'perfected' the patriarch's faith.

The ultimate conclusion in verse 24 has to be read in the light of these considerations, and then it appears plainly that there is no contradiction in fact between the two apostles. 'The argument . . . has no bearing on St. Paul's doctrine, its purport being, in the words of John Bunyan, to insist that "at the day of doom men shall be judged according to their fruit." It will not be said then, Did you believe? but, Were you doers or talkers only?' (Mayor, *Epistle of St. James*, LXXXVIII).

No doubt, the two men look at the truth from a somewhat different standpoint. The one is intensely practical, the other goes deeper. The one fixes his eye on the fruits, the other digs down to the root. To the one the flow of the river is the more prominent; to the other, the fountain from which it rises. But they supplement, and do not contradict, each other. A shrewd old Scotsman once criticised an elaborate 'Harmony' of the Gospels, by the remark that the author had 'spent a heap of pains in making four men agree that had never cast [fallen] out.' We may say the same of many laborious reconciliations of James, the urgent preacher of Christian righteousness, and Paul, the earnest proclaimer that 'a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.'

GOD'S FRIENDS

'He was called the Friend of God.'—JAMES ii. 23.

WHEN and by whom was he so called? There are two passages in the Old Testament in which an analogous designation is applied to the patriarch, but probably the name was one in current use amongst the people, and expressed in a summary fashion the impression that had been made by the history of Abraham's life. A sweet fate to have that as the brief record of a character, and to be known throughout the ages by such an epitaph! As many of us are aware, this name, 'the Friend,' has displaced the proper name, Abraham, on the lips of all Mohammedan people to this day; and the city of Hebron, where his corpse lies, is commonly known simply as 'the Friend.'

My object in this sermon is a very simple one. I

merely wish to bring out two or three of the salient elements and characteristics of friendship as exercised on the human level, and to use these as a standard and test of our religion and relation to God.

But I may just notice, for a moment, how beautiful and blessed a thought it is which underlies this and similar representations of Scripture—viz., that the bond which unites us to God is the very same as that which most sweetly and strongly ties men to one another, and that, after all, religion is nothing more or less than the transference to Him of the emotions which make all the sweetness of human life and society.

Now, I shall try to bring out two or three points which are included in that name, 'the Friend of God,' and to ask ourselves if they apply to our relations to Him.

I. First, friends trust and love one another.

Mutual confidence is the mortar which binds the stones in society together, into a building. It makes the difference between the herding together of beasts and the association of men. No community could keep together for an hour without mutual confidence, even in regard of the least intimate relationships of life. But it is the very life-blood of friendship. You cannot say, 'A. B. is my friend, but I do not trust him.' If suspicion creeps in, like the foul malaria of tropical swamps, it kills all friendship. Therefore 'he was called the Friend of God' is by James deduced from the fact that 'he believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.' You cannot make a friend of a man that you do not know where to have. There may be some vague reverence of, or abject reluctant submission to, 'the unknown God,' the something

outside of ourselves that perhaps makes for righteousness; but for any vivid, warm throb of friendship there must be, first, a clear knowledge, and then a living grappling of that knowledge to my very heart, by my faith. Unless I trust God I cannot be a friend of God's. If you and I are His friends we trust Him, and He will trust us. For this friendship is not one-sided, and the name, though it may be ambiguous as to whether it means one whom I love or one who loves me, really includes both persons to the compact; and there are analogous, if not identical, emotions in each. So that, if I trust God, I may be sure that God trusts me, and, in His confidence, leaves a great deal to me; and so ennobles and glorifies me by His reliance upon me.

But whilst we know that this belief in God was the very nerve and centre of Abraham's whole character, and was the reason why he was called the friend of God, we must also remember that, as James insists upon here, it was no mere idle assent, no mere intellectual conviction that God could not tell lies, which was dignified by the name of belief, but that it was, as James insists upon in the context, a trust which proved itself to be valid, because it was continually operative in the life. 'Faith without works is dead.' 'And Abraham, our father, was he not justified by works?'

And so the Epistle to the Hebrews, if you will remember, traces up to his faith all the chief points in his life. 'By faith he went out from the land where he dwelt; by faith he dwelt in tabernacles,' in the promised land, believing that it should be his and his seed's; 'by faith' he offered up his son on the altar.

Thus we come to this, that the heavenly and the

earthly friend, like friends on the low levels of humanity, love each other because they trust each other. I have said that the words 'My friend' may either mean one whom I love or one who loves me, but that the two things are in the present connection inseparable. Only let us remember where the sweet reciprocation and interchange of love begins. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' 'When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' And so we have to turn to that heavenly Friend, and feel that as life itself, so the love which is the life of life, has its beginning in Him, and that never would our hearts have turned themselves from their alienation, unless there had poured down upon them the attractive outflow of His great love. It was an old fancy that, wherever a tree was struck by lightning, all its tremulous foliage turned in the direction from which the bolt had come. When the merciful flash of God's great love strikes a heart, then all its tendrils turn to the source of the life-giving light, and we love back again, in sweet reverberation to the primal and original love. Dear brethren, I lay upon your heart and mine this thought, that friends trust and love each other. Do we trust and love our God?

II. Friends have frank, familiar intercourse with one another.

Let us turn to the illuminative example in our text, and remember God's frankness with Abraham. 'Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?' Let us cap that—as we can, marvellous and great as the utterance is—by another one, 'I call you not servants, but friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I declare unto you.' So much for God's frank-

ness. What about Abraham's frankness with God? Remember how he remonstrated with Him; how he complained to Him of His dealings; how he persisted with importunity, which would have been presumptuous but for the friendship which underlay it, and warranted the bold words. And let us take the simple lesson that if we are friends and lovers of God, we shall delight in intercourse with Him. It is a strange kind of religion that does not care to be with God, that would rather think about anything else than about Him, that is all unused to quiet, solitary conversation and communion with Him, but it is the religion of, I wonder, how many of us to-day. He would be a strange friend that never crossed your threshold if you could help it; that was evidently uncomfortable in your presence, and ill at ease till he got away from you, and that when he came was struck dumb, and had not a word to say for himself, and did not know or feel that he and you had any interests or subjects in common. Is that not a good deal like the religion of hosts of professing Christians? 'He was called the friend of God,' and he never, all his days, if he could help it, thought about Him or went near Him!

If we are friends of God, we shall have no secrets from Him. There are very few of those who are dearest to us to whom we could venture to lay bare all the depths of our hearts. There are black things down in the cellars that we do not like to show to any of our friends. We receive them upstairs, in the rooms for company. But you should take God all through the house. And if there is the trust and the love that I have been speaking about, we shall not be afraid to spread out all our foulness, and our meanness, and

our unworthy thoughts of, and acts towards, Him, before His 'pure eyes and perfect judgment,' and say, 'Nobody but my best friend could look at such a dungheap, but I spread it before Thee. Look at it, and Thou wilt cleanse it; look at it, and it will melt away. Look at it, and in the knowledge that Thou knowest, my knowledge of it will be less of a torment, and my bosom will be cleansed of its perilous stuff.'

Tell God all, if you mean to be a friend of His. And do not be afraid to tell Him your harsh thoughts of Him, and your complaints of Him. He never resents anything that a man who loves Him says *about* Him, if he says it *to* Him. What He resents—if I might use the word—is our huddling up grudges and murmurings and questionings in our own hearts, and saying never a word to the friend against whom they offend. Out with it all, brethren! Complaints, regrets, questionings, petitions, hot wishes, take them all to Him; and be sure that instead of their breaking, they will, if spoken, cement the friendship which is disturbed by secrecy on our parts.

If we are God's lovers, He will have no secrets from us. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.' There is a strange wisdom and insight, sometimes amounting even to prophetic anticipation, which creeps into a simple heart that is knit closely to God. But whether the result of our friendship with Him be such communication of such kinds of insight or no, we may be sure of this, that, if we trust Him, and love Him, and are frank with Him, He will in so far be frank with us, that He will impart unto us Himself, and in the knowledge of His love we shall find all the knowledge that we need.

III. Friends delight to meet each other's wishes.

Let us go back to our story again. The humble, earthly friend of God did as God bade him, substantially all his life, from the day when he made the 'Great Refusal,' and left behind him home and kindred and all, until the day when he went up the sides of Moriah to offer there his son. Abraham met God's wishes because Abraham trusted and loved God.

And what about the Divine Friend? Did He not meet Abraham's wishes? You remember that wonderful scene, which presents, in such vivid and dramatic form, the everlasting truth that the man who bows his will to God, bows God's will to his, when he pleaded for Sodom, and won his case by persistence and importunity of lowly prayer. And these historical notices on both sides are for us the vehicles of the permanent truth that, if we are God's lovers and friends, we shall find nothing sweeter than bowing to His will and executing His commandments. As I dare say I have often said to you, the very mark and signature of love is that it delights to divine and fulfil the desires of the beloved, and that it moulds the will of each of the parties into conformity with the will of the other.

Ah, dear brethren! what a commentary our religion is upon such thoughts! To how many of us is the very notion of religion that of a prohibition of things that we would much like to do, and of commands to do things that we had much rather not do? All the slavery of abject submission, of reluctant service, is clean swept away, when we understand that friendship and love find their supreme delight in discovering and in executing the will of the beloved. And surely if you and I are the friends of God, the cold words, 'duty,' 'must,' 'should,' will be struck out of our

vocabulary and will be replaced by 'delight,' 'cannot but,' 'will.' For friends find the very life—I was going to say the voice—of their friendship in mutual obedience.

And God, the heavenly Friend, will do what we wish. In that very connection did Jesus Christ put the two thoughts of friendship with Him and His executing His disciple's behests; saying in one breath, 'Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you,' and in the next, 'Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' This conformity of will, so that there is but one will in the two hearts, which is the very consummation and superlative degree of human friendship and love, applies as truly to the friendship between man and God.

IV. Friends give gifts to each other.

Let us go back to our story. What did Abraham give God? 'Forasmuch as he hath not withheld his only son from Me, I know that he fears Me.' And what does God give to His friends? 'He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up to the death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Abraham's gift of his son to God was but a feeble shadow of God's gift of His Son to men. And if the surrender on the part of the human friend was the infallible token of his love, surely the surrender on the part of the heavenly Friend is no less the infallible sign of His love to all the world. Generalise these thoughts and they come to this. If we are God's lovers God will give us Himself, in so far as we can receive Him; and all other gifts in so far as they are good and needful. If we are God's friends and lovers we shall give Him, in glad surrender, our whole selves. And, remember, if you feel that you have separate

interests from Him, if you keep things and do not let Him say, 'These are mine'; if you grudge sacrifice, and will not hear of self-surrender, and are living lives centred in, ruled by, devoted to, self, you have little reason to call yourself a Christian. 'Ye are My friends if ye'—not only 'do whatsoever I command you,' but 'if you give yourself to Me.' Yield yourselves to God, and in the giving of yourselves to Him, you will get back yourselves glorified and blessed by the gift. There is no friendship if self shuts out the friend from participation in what is the other's. As long as 'mine' lies on this side of a high wall, and 'thine' on the other, there is but little friendship. Down with the wall, and say about everything 'Ours'; and then you have a right to say 'I am the friend of God.'

V. Lastly, and but a word. Friends stand up for each other.

'I am thy shield; fear not, Abraham,' said God, when His friend was in danger from the vengeance of the Eastern kings whom he had defeated; and all through life the same strong arm was cast around him. Abraham, on his part, had to stand up for God amidst his heathen neighbours.

If we are God's friends and lovers He will take up our cause. Be sure that if God be for us, it matters not who is against us. If we are God's friends and lovers we have to take up His cause. What would you think of a man who, in going away to a far-off country, said to some friend, 'I wish you would look after so and so for me as long as I am gone'; and the friend would say 'Yes!' and never give a thought nor lift a finger to discharge the obligation? God trusts His reputation to you Christian people; He has interests in this world that you have to look after. You have to defend Him

as really as He has to defend you. And it is the dreadful contradiction of religious people's profession of religion that they often care so little, and do so little to promote the cause, to defend the name, to adorn the reputation, and to further what I may venture to call the interests, of their heavenly Friend in the world.

Dear brother, looking at these things, can you venture to say that you are a friend of God? If you cannot, what are you? Our relations to men admit of our dividing them into three—friends, enemies, nothings. We may love, we may hate, we may be absolutely indifferent and ignorant. I am afraid the three states cannot be transferred exactly to our relations to God. If not His friend, what are you? Have you only a far-off, bowing acquaintance with Him? Well, then, that is because you have neglected, if you have not spurned, His offered friendship. And, oh! how much you have lost! No human heart is a millionth part so sweet, and so capable of satisfying you as God's. All friendship here has its limits, its changes, its end. God's is boundless, immutable, eternal. All things are the friends of God's friend; and all things are arrayed against him who rejects God's friendship.

I beseech you, let Him woo you to love Him; and yield your hearts to Him. 'If when we were "enemies," we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son,' much more, being friends, all the fulness of His love and the sweetness of His heart will be poured upon us through the living Christ.

A WATCH ON THE DOOR OF THE LIPS

'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. 2. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 3. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 5. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. 7. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? 12. Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. 13. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.'—JAMES iii. 1-13.

THERE is a recurrence to earlier teaching in James i. 19, 26, which latter verse suggests the figure of the bridle. James has drunk deep into Old Testament teaching as to the solemn worth of speech, and into Christ's declaration that by their words men will be justified or condemned.

No doubt, Eastern peoples are looser tongued than we Westerns are; but modern life, with its great development of cities and its swarm of newspapers and the like, has heightened the power of spoken and printed words, and made James's exhortations even more necessary. His teaching here gathers round several images — the bridle, the fire, the untamed creature, the double fountain. We deal with these in order.

I. No doubt, in the infant Church, with its flexible organisation, there were often scenes very strange to our eyes, such as Paul hints at in 1 Corinthians xiv. 26-33, where many voices of would-be teachers contended for

a hearing. James would check that unwholesome eagerness by the thought that teachers who do not practice what they preach will receive a heavier judgment than those who did not set up to be instructors. He humbly classes himself with the teachers. The 'for' of verse 2 introduces a reason for the advice in verse 1—since it is hard to avoid falls, and harder in respect to speech than action, it is a dangerous ambition to be a teacher.

That thought leads on to the series of considerations as to the government of the tongue. He who can completely keep it under command is a 'perfect' man, because the difficulty of doing so is so great that the attainment of it is a test of perfection. James is like the Hebrew prophets, in that he does not so much argue as illustrate. His natural speech is imagery, and here he pours out a stream of it. The horse's bridle and the ship's rudder may be taken together as both illustrating the two points that the tongue guides the body, and that it is intended that the man should guide the tongue. These two ideas are fused together here. The bridle is put into the mouth, and what acts on the mouth influences the direction of the horse's course. The rudder is but a little bit of wood, but its motion turns the great ship, even when driven by wild winds. 'So the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things,' which boasting is not false, for the whole point of the passage is that that little member has large power.

Is it true, as James says, that it governs our actions as the bridle does the horse, or the rudder the ship? No doubt, many sins go straight from the inner chambers of the heart's desires out into the world of action without going round by the way of speech; but still, if we

think of the immense power of our own words and of others in setting our activities in motion, of the dreadful harvest of sin which has often sprung from one tempting word, of the ineffaceable traces of pollution which some vile book leaves in memory and heart, of the good and evil which have been wrought by spoken or printed words, and that never more truly than to-day, when a flood of talk all but drowns the world, we shall not think James exaggerating in the awful weight he gives to speech as the mother of action.

His other point is that this guiding power needs guidance. A firm yet gentle hand touches the rein, and the sensitive mouth yields to the light pressure. The steerman's hand pushes or draws the tiller an inch from or towards him, and the huge vessel yaws accordingly. Speech is often loose. Most men set less careful watch on the door of their lips than of their actions; but it would be wiser to watch the inner gate, which leads from thought to speech, than the outer one, which leads from speech to act. Idle words, rash words, unconsidered words, free-flowing words, make up much of our conversation. 'His tongue ran away with him' is too often true. It is hard but possible, and it is needful, to guide the helm, to keep a tight hand on the reins.

II. The next figure is that of the fire, suggested by the illustration of the small spark which sets a great forest ablaze. Drop a match or a spark from a locomotive or a pipe in the prairie grass, and we know what comes. The illustration was begun to carry on the contrast between the small member and its great results; but James catches fire, and goes off after the new suggestion, 'The tongue is a fire.'

Our space forbids discussing the interpretation of

the difficult verse 6, but the general bearing of it is clear. It reiterates under a fresh figure the thought of the preceding verses as to the power of the tongue to set the whole body in motion. Only the imagery is more lurid, and suggests more fatal issues from an unhallowed tongue's influence. It 'defileth the whole body.' Foul speech, heard in schools or places of business, read in filthy books, heard in theatres, has polluted many a young life, and kindled fires which have destroyed a man, body and soul. Speech is like the axle which, when it gets heated, sets the wheel on fire. And what comes of the train then? And what set the axle ablaze? The sulphurous flames from the pit of Gehenna. No man who knows life, especially among young boys and young men, will think that James has lost the government of *his* tongue in speaking thus.

III. Next comes the figure of the untamable wild beast. We need not pin James down to literal accuracy any more than to scientific classification in his zoology. His general statement is true enough for his purpose, for man has long ago tamed, and still continues to use as tamed, a crowd of animals of most diverse sorts, fierce and meek, noxious and harmless.

But, says James, in apparent contradiction to himself, there is one creature that resists all such efforts. Then what is the sense of your solemn exhortations, James, if 'the tongue can no man tame'? In that case he who is able to bridle it must be more than a perfect man. Yes, James believed that, though he says little about it. He would have us put emphasis on 'no *man*.' Man's impossibilities are Christ's actualities. So we have here to fall back on James's earlier word, 'If any of you lack, . . . let him ask of God, . . . and

it shall be given him.' The position of 'man' in the Greek is emphatic, and suggests that the thought of divine help is present to the Apostle.

He adds a characterisation of the tongue, which fits in with his image of an untamable brute: 'It is a restless evil,' like some caged but unsubdued wild animal, ever pacing uneasily up and down its den; 'full of deadly poison,' like some captured rattlesnake. The venom spurted out by a calumnious tongue is more deadly than any snake poison. Blasphemous words, or obscene words, shot into the blood by one swift dart of the fangs, may corrupt its whole current, and there is no Pasteur to expel the virus.

IV. The last image, that of the fountain, is adduced to illustrate the strange inconsistencies of men, as manifested in their speech. Words of prayer and words of cursing come from the same lips. No doubt, these hot-tempered, and sometimes ferociously religious, Jewish Christians, to whom James speaks, had some among them whose portraits James is drawing here. 'Away with such a fellow from the earth!' is a strange sequel to 'Blessed be he, the God of our fathers.' But the combination has often been heard since. Te Deums and anathemas have succeeded one another in strange union, and religious controversy has not always been conducted with perfect regard to James's precepts.

Of course when the Apostle gibbets the grotesque inconsistency of such a union, he is not to be taken as allowing cursing, if it only keeps clear of 'blessing God.' Since the latter is the primary duty of all, and the highest exercise of the great gift of speech, anything inconsistent with it is absolutely forbidden, and to show the inconsistency is to condemn the act.

Further, the assertion that 'salt water cannot yield sweet' implies that the 'cursing' destroys the reality of the verbal 'blessing God.' If a man says both, the imprecation is his genuine voice, and the other is mere wind.

The fountain is deeper than the tongue. From the heart are the issues of life. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and clear, pure waters will not well out thence unless the heart has been cleansed by Christ entering into it. Only when that tree of life is cast into the waters are they made sweet. When Christ governs us, we can govern our hearts and our lips, and through these our whole bodies and all their activities.

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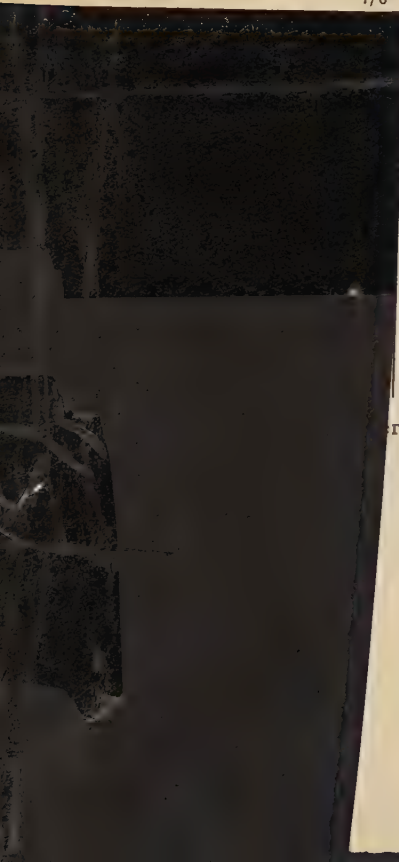

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